

Alan Glazier RIP • Gerwyn Price • Paul Sculthorpe • Deta Hedman • Daryl Gurney

**DARTS WORLD MAGAZINE**

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**MANSCAPED**

# The humble hero

**EXCLUSIVE: SHY GUY WORLD CHAMP WRIGHT**

Jacqui Oatley • Polly James • Nigel Pearson • Matthew Porter • Laura Turner

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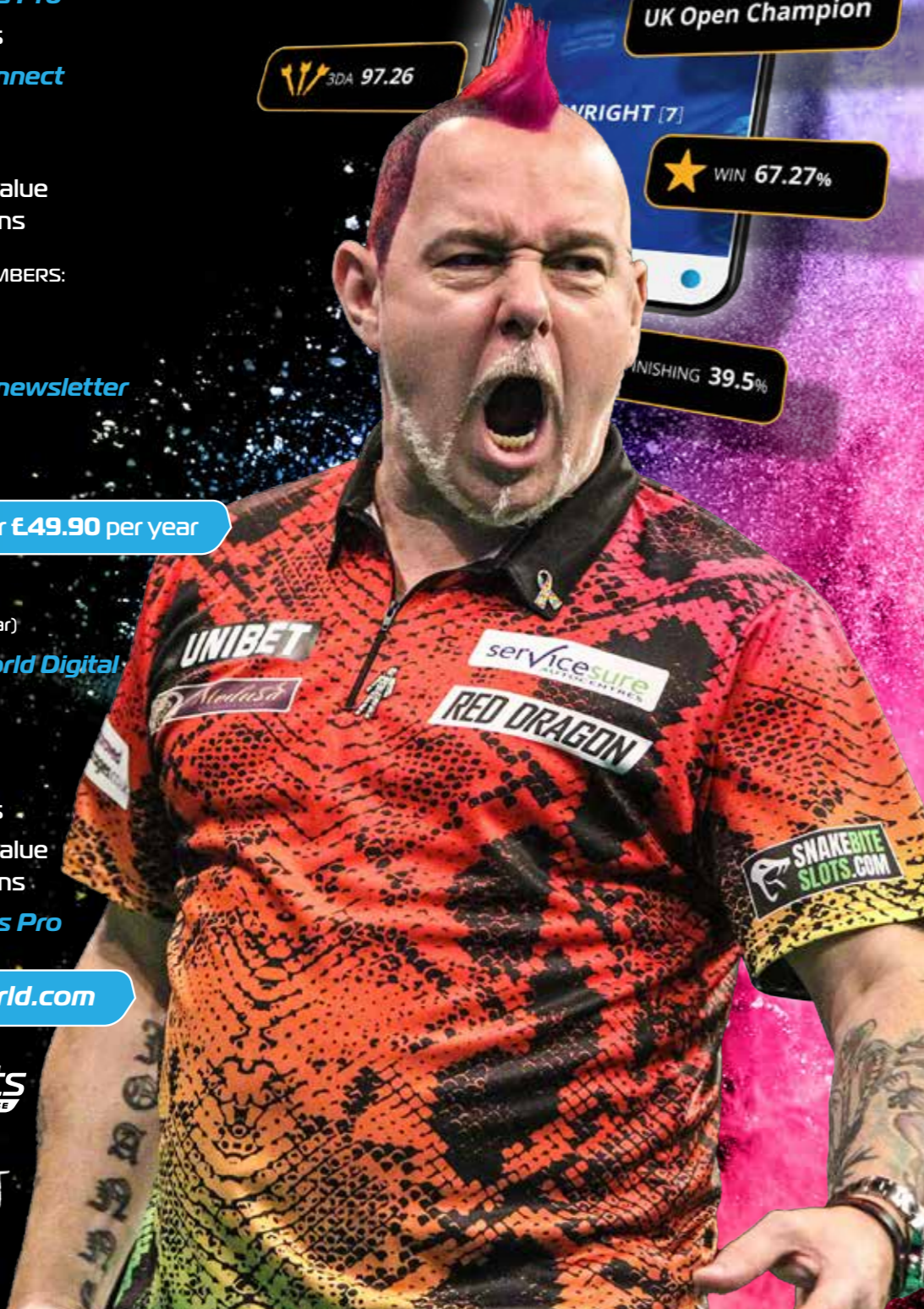
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## Inside 572



## On the OCHE



**THE Alexandra Palace has survived two huge fires and being hit by a German doodlebug bomb in 1944, which exploded and blew the famous rose window to smithereens.**

This great old lady 'People's Palace' has seen it all. Now World Championship darts has defied the global Covid-19 pandemic and will take place at this bastion of sporting legend. It has unquestionably been an almost impossible task pulled off by the Professional Darts Corporation. Trying to organise the biggest sporting event of the winter in the UK on the backdrop of the Prime Minister's tiers of a clown system has been more treacherous than two armies calling a truce to play football in no man's land at the Somme on Christmas day just over 100 years ago.

At the time of going to press, there was still no confirmation of whether this year's Ally Pally would be no man's or woman's land. The PDC were still trying to clamber through metaphorical barbed wire of pandemic guidelines to allow fans back to attend the World Championship. It seems almost bizarre now to watch TV coverage of Peter Wright's raucous walk-on before beating Michael van Gerwen in last year's world final. Fans or no fans, it is a phenomenal achievement that at least the grand ol' Ally Pally will remain the fitting venue for this World Championship.

We must acknowledge the PDC's consistent force in getting darts back on TV during the most rollercoaster of challenging months during the pandemic.

The debate over no fans attending, fake crowd noise, living in hotel bubbles, being away from families has raged since events returned in the summer. But the reality is that the prize money has stayed the same. No one has complained about the size of their winning cheque. Get over it.

That's not been an easy pill to swallow for the bean counters in Brentwood. But they've taken the financial hit and will continue to do so to keep the sport at the very top of the sporting agenda. The Ally Pally is where legends are born and made. Talking of legends, we must extend our love and gratitude to commentator John Gwynne.

The broadcasting legend revealed recently that recent hospital tests have revealed a tumour and possibly others. Gwynne will have the entire darts family fighting his corner for a battle ahead. You could write on the back of a fag packet what that man doesn't know about this sport.

That old gravelly-voice has called home some champions, as we are frequently reminded on the bespoke Sky Sports Darts channel at Christmas. That "is it, is it" line when Raymond van Barneveld beat Phil Taylor at the Circus in 2007 was stuff of true commentary genius. Keep fighting Gwynne, we're with you all the way.

So now attention turns to the big one. This is our World Championship special edition packed with all the top names vying for the Sid Waddell Trophy. But least that trophy will be lifted at the Alexandra Palace on Sunday, January 3.

A famous old building conceived by a Welsh architect Owen Jones. An omen perhaps.

Phil Lanning - Editor

## Darts World

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# SNAKE CHARMER

The endearing, enchanting life beyond the adulation of Peter Wright...

**T**HE sound of a hammer banging nails into wood pierces the birdsong in the blazing hot sun on a beautiful May day in Suffolk.

This brutal din emanates from a man with his grey joggers hanging down exposing a backside of wacky Space Jam boxer shorts, dusty t-shirt and dirty trainers.

Midway through lockdown, the UK gripped by the coronavirus pandemic, this man is oblivious to the world and its problems.

It's hard to believe that just five months earlier, he had the world at his feet.

But this is the real Peter Wright.

Forget the adulation, screaming, shouting, celebrating of the Ally Pally. This is Snakebite beyond the mohawk, cacophony of cocksure, kaleidoscope of colours.

Underneath all the warpaint, Wright is a shy guy. He's almost embarrassed by the hullabaloo and hero worship. He's just Mr Humble.

Now and again, Wright will big himself up, play the media game of hype. But that's only a brief punctuation of playing down his achievements and talking about how proud he is to just play amongst the greats.

Wright, 50, hardly acknowledges joining the legendary names of World Champions he joined on

January 1, almost like he doesn't believe it still.

But after the winning dart and embracing Michael van Gerwen, the look of sheer joy and love towards his tearful wife and kids said it all.

In a frank and emotional exclusive interview, Wright admitted what it truly meant. He told me: "It's the sacrifices people don't see.

"This is not just about me. Like when I won the Europeans, it was great to get my Twitter gang all telling me well done. But the most important thing was Paul running me around and driving and wife Jo looking after me.

"My family back home in England allow me to go and

play these darts by missing out on everything. They've done that throughout their lives. I've missed all the stuff they've done at school, proms and shows.

"I was lucky enough to see my two grandchildren the other day before I left for another tournament. Ralph is five days old and Rio who is nine now.

"First thing he does when he comes over is 'where's grandad'. We had a game of pool, throw some darts, he didn't want to leave. I told him I was going to be away for three weeks.

"But we then organise what we are going to do when I'm back, like cook him a roast dinner.

"My family is everything. I looked



I have fulfilled my dream. That's the most important thing. I've done it for me and my family. We have come through a lot, so much hard work. We have achieved what we set out to do.

EXCLUSIVE WORDS: PHIL LANNING PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

across at Jo and the kids after winning at the Ally Pally. They were in tears and they set me off!

"We are close knit. At the end of the day I'm just a guy who enjoys a game of darts. I love playing against outstanding players like Gary, MVG and when Phil and Barney were playing. Just to beat Adrian Lewis, just to be playing against these guys is special.

"For me to be No.2 in the world is crazy. My name is on that World Championship trophy alongside the likes of Eric Bristow, John Lowe, Jocky Wilson.

"That doesn't really sink in to be honest. Maybe when I've retired and got my feet up and all these new young guys take over the world and playing for a million pound, I might sit there and say my name is on that trophy."

Wright would have good reason to be a tad bitter about 2020. When the point of his second dart stuck into double 10, a following 11 months of satisfaction of sacrifices payback beckoned. A multitude of walk-ons, bellowing from MC John McDonald, "Champion of the World". The goosebumps, glam and glitter.

But after just three months, Covid-19 ripped fans from sport and the heart out of any joy this year could bring.

However, typical of Wright, he doesn't feel that way. He added: "It has been heartbreaking in some ways. But you can't think that way, you need to think of the bigger picture. There's more important things in people's lives than me worrying about being World Champion. There's people out there who have lost loved ones from this virus.

"At least I haven't had to do millions of interviews all year like all the past World Champions have!

"To be honest I know I'm going to win it again, retain it this year. With the positive news of the vaccine as well, I'll get to enjoy being World Champion next year.



WRIGHT STUFF...family celebrate after Peter's win, son Tristan, daughters Naomi and Jessica, Naomi's boyfriend Stuart and wife Jo.



"I have fulfilled my dream. That's the most important thing. I've done it for me and my family. We have come through a lot, so much hard work. We have achieved what we set out to do.

"I've only got one player to play and that will be in the semi-finals, that will be Gezzy. I know what I've got to do to beat him. He probably knows what he'd got to do. But on the day I think I'll have the game to get to another final."

Back to that May day in Suffolk, Wright was building a 40 foot polytunnel greenhouse. The lifestyle is idyllic. Growing an array of impressive vegetables, a load of chickens hopping about and a hugely-resourceful family.

Wife Jo is the brains behind the sensational head paint artistry, dubbed by this writer as the 'Banksy of Bullseyes'. As well as the

hairdressing, there's knitting, sewing and a plethora of other projects.

It clearly gets harder for Wright to leave home for the oche. Did lockdown give him an early taste of retirement?

He added: "Lockdown felt good for two months and then I wanted to play darts again.

"Retirement? Not yet. But I have got a plan. However if I'm still playing well obviously I'll carry on. When I've had enough I'll just walk away from the game.

"It's hard at the moment because I've found a nice throw and I know I can go a long way and raise the averages a lot higher, be more consistent. I can improve.

"While Michael is not on form and Gary's not playing as much. If Gary was playing all the time he'd be No.1 in the world, we all know that.

"With respect to all the other guys, I know there's some massive averages and fantastic players, but consistently there's only me and Gezzy playing well at the moment.

"I've not done everything. I've not won the Players Championship yet, I did the Masters this year. I also want the Premier League and Grand Slam.

"As far as the Worlds I think I'll do a Gary and an Adrian and win it back-to-back. Ask me the same question next year if I want a hat-trick!"

The hard work ethic is engrained into the Wrights. Dimitri Van den Bergh stayed with the family during lockdown and dubbed him 'The Professor' for an incredible knowledge of types of darts, flights, stems and how they fly.

Wright admits that he admires those who put the hard graft in but still doesn't consider himself a sporting icon.

He does not expect to make the shortlist for BBC Sports Personality of the Year despite become World Champion and winning the Summer Series, European

Championship and Ladbrokes Masters.

He added: "Not at all. There are plenty of other sportspeople out there who deserve it more than I do. It's only a game of darts.

"We put in a lot of hard work, the man who should have won it was Phil Taylor. I haven't got any chance of winning it.

"I haven't been invited on the short list. It's been a poor year for everything and everybody, fingers crossed everything gets better soon, all the sports get back.

"Darts should get recognised more. I don't know, people don't seem to take it as serious because we don't get paid £250,000 for sitting on a bench. Us guys battling it out on stage is very difficult.

"Then you would have people say there were no other sports that year, that's why he won it!

"Tony McCoy was my sporting hero. I used to bet but I haven't done now for about 10 years. What he used to go through, have a fall, break stuff and then go in oxygen tanks to get fit again. He'd be back a week later.

"The work racing jockey's do is incredible, the travelling, the crazy diet and fitness. I also admire Ruby Walsh. what they put themselves through is different class.

"I also really admire Sir Chris Hoy, what he did for cycling, oh my God. The size of his thighs, what a powerhouse!

"The speed he went at and all the years and years of hard work, practice, training, diet. Absolutely incredible."

Like his heroes, Wright has put the hours in.

A solid family man, even in lockdown on and off the big stage, still hammering away building a secure future for his family.

He won't take the credit or truly acknowledge what he's achieved.

But in truth, he's already nailed it.

## IT'S FARMER WRIGHTS! EXCLUSIVE

**A**WAY from darts, it's farmer Wright. The contrast of worlds from the adulation on the oche to a farm in the deepest Suffolk.

The Wrights are undoubtedly a very industrious and resourceful bunch.

During lockdown they had a lodger Dimitri Van den Bergh after he became stranded in the UK following the travel ban.

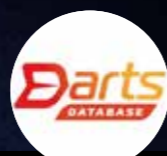
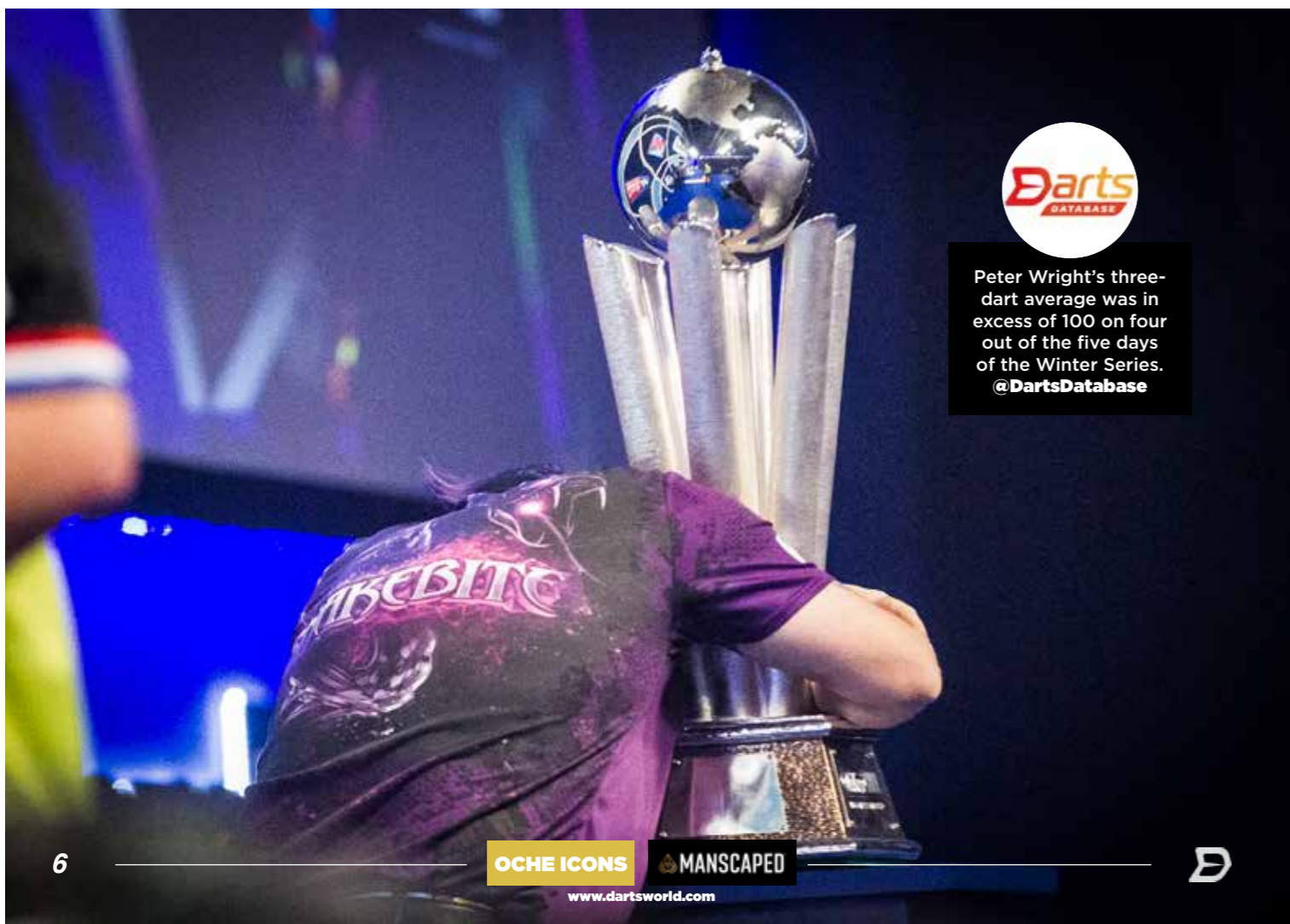
He was involved in building a 40 foot polytunnel greenhouse with the World Champion and since then wife Jo has grown a first crop delivering beetroot, spinach, lettuce, round courgettes, kale, strawberries and tomatoes.

Jo, dubbed as 'The Banksy of the Bullseyes' for her famous amazing hair and headpaint designs for her husband, has been knitting baby clothes - and a cute Unicorn - for Michael van Gerwen's new baby and even wacky face mask designs, hats, gloves, cardigans and jumpers.

The Wright kids have set up a home spa room where they do hair and nails.

Not only that but they have 80 chickens and were taking eggs round to locals who couldn't travel to shops.

Peter's other talents include cooking roasts, sweet and sour chicken balls, corned beef pie and toad in the hole. Plus fitting his latest Remi-fit mattresses for the best possible sleep before a hard day on the farm!



Peter Wright's three-dart average was in excess of 100 on four out of the five days of the Winter Series. @DartsDatabase



# Matt PORTER



**ONE of the most challenging parts of my job in any normal year is putting together our calendar of events.**

There are so many factors that need to be considered: venue availability and suitability, travel and accommodation requirements, sponsor and broadcaster requirements, frequency and spacing of tournaments, cut-off dates for Premier events etc being the main ones.

In a 'normal' year, myself and our Tournament Director Graham Fairhurst and Head of Production Mark Leak would start on it in around March (with various venues having already been reserved up to three years in advance!) and aim to have it ready for release to the players and public by August.

With 2020 being anything but normal, we're currently on version 12 of our calendar (version three was started at the beginning of the March restrictions!) and the 2021 version has so many moving parts it might as well be written with one of those school pencils with a rubber on the end!

Our delivery of events across not only our Professional tier, but also our Secondary Tour levels (Development, Challenge and Women's) has been something we've been really pleased with over the last eight months, and bearing in mind the different restrictions across Europe and the travel issues that go with that, it's been little short of miraculous how we've managed to deliver 23 Players Championships, four European Tours and 11 Premier Events this year, but for some time now our thoughts have turned to 2021 and what we will and won't be able to do.

Our structure hinges on Q School and we are very much aiming to stage our UK and European events as normal but it's how we follow those up that counts.

Will we be permitted to stage Challenge and Development Tour events? Will players be willing to travel at that level where prize money often doesn't cover expenses, but the carrot at the end of the stick is enticing!?

Our five-day seasonal Series Players Championship events have been resoundingly well received by players and fans alike, but in a 'normal' year they are difficult to schedule.

For the first four months of the season (February - May) the Premier League gets in the way, and then in to the summer we have the World Series before the autumn/winter bring the majority of our televised events.

So we have a myriad of options and as ever we'll be flexible and creative to continue to deliver as many events as we are logistically and legally able to, in safe environments for the participants and staff.

We desperately hope to be able to welcome fans back sooner rather than later, and we're front and centre with the UK government on discussions on that front.

Whatever happens, it's our job to ensure 2021 is a great year for darts and I can assure you we're all working tirelessly to make that happen.

Thanks to you all for your support, however you have engaged with us, during 2020 and I wish you and your families a lovely Christmas - let's try and end the year on a high!

**Matthew Porter is Chief Executive of the Professional Darts Corporation.**



# THE SPECIAL WON

De Sousa is Slam champ in style

WORDS: PHIL LANNING PHOTOGRAPHY: LAWRENCE LUSTIG

**J**OSE De Sousa proved that he truly is The Special One after winning the BoyleSports Grand Slam on his debut.

The Portuguese star, who started the tournament at World No.34, dumped nine-times major winner James Wade 16-12 in the final.

Named after Spurs boss Mourinho, De Sousa landed the £125,000 with a slick display including 15 180s and an incredible 158 finish to win it.

De Sousa now jumps into the top 16 players in the world and said: "I cannot explain this, it is a dream come true. The greatest day of my life. When I finished that 158 I know I am going to cry.

"I now have the respect of the other players, now they know I can do this. I hope I can make more tournaments like this and give more happiness for more people, fans, family and sponsors.

"Mac Elkin has been unbelievable, he support me all the time in every moment. I just want to thank you all these people.

"I don't have words right now to explain how I feel properly.

"It was so nice the feeling in that moment. It was amazing, unbelievable. That moment when I threw the last dart, I know I'm going to make it.

"I almost started to cry before I threw the dart. When I hit the double it was unbelievable."

Wade had started the stronger with an

early 3-0 lead. But De Sousa charged back to lead 12-10 with a stunning run of four legs out of five wins to take control.

Runner-up Wade, who picked up £65k, added: "I think I was pretty rubbish he outplayed me by a million miles. It hurts when you don't perform. It is a bitter sweet pill to swallow."

De Sousa now has the World Championship on the horizon and is likely to get an invite into the Unibet Premier League in 2021 as a major winner.

But the Ally Pally is next and he added: "I don't know what I can do there but my confidence is 200 per cent right now so I know I can do this. I can play against all the players, it doesn't matter.

"The Premier League is possible but I don't want to think of that right now. I just want to finish the year, then we will see the results. I hope so."

Wade remains one short of becoming the third man to win 10 major titles and he looked on as a tearful De Sousa enjoyed the moment of his life - just a couple of years on from leaving life as a carpenter behind to become a professional and secure his Tour Card at Q-School in January 2019.

He added: "To leave my work I think it was the right decision. I still have contact with my ex boss, he's a lovely guy. It was a good thing for my family, I think my wife is crying right now!

"This changes everything. Right now I don't have to think of money problems, they are all finished. So I'm a really happy guy."

# Jacqui OATLEY

**IT'S hard to underestimate the importance of the recent Women's Series.**

The strength of the women's game has pushed on after the exploits of Fallon Sherrock and Mikuru Suzuki at last year's World Championship and then Lisa Ashton winning a PDC Tour Card in January.

Despite the 2020 sporting calendar being ripped apart by Covid-19, it was good to see the Women's Series go ahead. It's essential they have this competitive platform against their peers for the development of the game.

Some of the averages and performances raised a few eyebrows and it proves the game is moving in the right direction.

However, there's a long way to go. Progress is all about constantly keeping the ball rolling.

On the flip side from the success of the Women's Series - and congratulations to the PDC for that - is that the British Darts Organisation has come to a sad end. That also means the Ladies' World Championship.

That had been the mainstay of the women's game for a substantial number of years and it's a massive blow and void that needs to be filled.

There is no doubt at all that the calendar for the women needs more competition dates to be added so it can raise the standard and increase the strength in depth of the wider talent pool. We know what the headline acts can do, but it's the tiers below that need encouragement and development.

But the good news is that the continued success of Deta Hedman, Ashton, Sherrock and Suzuki keeps the women's game high on the agenda.

It is rewarding to feel the shift of opinion. There is an acceptance that these women can compete on their own merits instead of being seen as something of a novelty. Perhaps we had to go through that phase in order to come through the other side. When Fallon made the headlines at Ally Pally, it reminded me of the scrutiny I experienced when I made my debut on Match of the Day. It was seen as a novelty as people assumed a woman

couldn't possibly commentate on a men's Premier League game on TV without it being something of a freak show. Even though I found that level of scrutiny and analysis of my "performance" suffocating and deeply uncomfortable, it was a relief to come through it relatively unscathed and now a female presence in the commentary box is no longer worthy of heated debate.

When you look at the recent Grand Slam of Darts, which was sadly not in my beloved Wolverhampton but it was still a fantastic event, Mikuru had a match dart at tops to beat Gerwyn Price - arguably the best player in the world right now - in their opening group match.

That's despite Suzuki hardly having played a competitive match for months.

It was also nice to hear Michael Smith's commendation for his oche pal Lisa. All-

in-all, the women's game is heading in the right direction.

We'll shortly be able to sit back and enjoy watching Lisa and Deta at the World Championship. It's a fascinating prospect.

And what a story it is for Hedman at the age of 61. No one can match her life story in darts, no one can match her fight.

It's been wonderful to be able to offer top level darts on ITV Sport from the European Championship. Peter Wright became unplayable as the tournament unfolded. Now the big question is whether he can re-produce that form to win the Sid Waddell Trophy once again.

We must not overlook the biggest factor of all. That we are fortunate to have sport back on television during Covid-19 crisis.

So many other sports haven't been so lucky. It is hugely disappointing that grassroots sport has been ruled out during this difficult period of time.

While darts may not be seen as the most athletic pursuit, the enjoyment of competition is very healthy. We can start the day by getting outside with the kids, playing football, chucking balls around, then we can head back indoors and warm-up, switch on the TV and watch the darts. Perfect!

**Jacqui Oatley is a presenter of ITV4 darts coverage and Sky Sports News.**

## Fans hope for Ally Pally

**P**ETER WRIGHT could kick off his William Hill World Championship title defence in front of fans when the showpiece event kicks off on December 15.

Following the UK government's announcement of their post-lockdown plans in England from December 2 onwards, the PDC will now be working with the Ally Pally to explore the potential for fans to attend the event.

Wright beat Michael van Gerwen to win his first world title on New Year's Day and the 96-player tournament will see stars from across the globe competing for £2.5 million in prize money and the prestigious Sid Waddell Trophy in 28 sessions of action throughout the festive period.

The World Championship's opening nine days at Alexandra Palace from December 15 until the Christmas break will see the first and second rounds take place. The action will resume with the third and fourth rounds across four days between Christmas and New Year, with play from December 27-30.

New Year's Day will see the quarter-finals take place, with the semi-finals on Saturday January 2 ahead of the showpiece final on Sunday January 3.

Information will be posted once confirmed at [www.pdc.tv/tickets](http://www.pdc.tv/tickets), where fans can also sign up to receive email updates.

**2020/21 William Hill World Darts Championship Session Schedule (times to be announced)**

**Tuesday December 15**  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round

**Wednesday December 16**  
Afternoon Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round  
Evening Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round

**Thursday December 17**  
Afternoon Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round  
Evening Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round

**Friday December 18**  
Afternoon Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round  
Evening Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round

**Saturday December 19**  
Afternoon Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round  
Evening Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round

**Sunday December 20**  
Afternoon Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round  
Evening Session  
3x First Round, 1x Second Round

**Monday December 21**  
4x Second Round

**Tuesday December 22**  
Afternoon Session  
4x Second Round  
Evening Session  
4x Second Round

**Wednesday December 23**  
Afternoon Session  
4x Second Round  
Evening Session  
4x Second Round

**Sunday December 27**  
Afternoon Session  
3x Third Round  
Evening Session  
3x Third Round

**Monday December 28**  
Afternoon Session  
3x Third Round  
Evening Session  
3x Third Round

**Tuesday December 29**  
Afternoon Session  
3x Third Round  
Evening Session  
1x Third Round, 2x Fourth Round

**Wednesday December 30**  
Afternoon Session  
3x Fourth Round  
Evening Session  
3x Fourth Round

**Friday January 1**  
Afternoon Session  
2x Quarter-Finals  
Evening Session  
2x Quarter-Finals

**Saturday January 2**  
Semi-Finals

**Sunday January 3**  
Final





MORE THAN JUST A GAME

# IT'S VERBAL WAR of the Worlds

THE FIGHTING FOR SID PSYCHOLOGY HAS KICKED OFF

WORDS: PHIL LANNING  
PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING



## **R**AT, cowards, childish...

Just three words from players aimed at rivals over the past couple of weeks.

The ol' mercury is rising as the Sid Waddell Trophy is on the horizon.

Oh yes, it's the World Championship season.

The mind games have begun.

To be fair, it seems as if an awful lot of this is generated by click bait media desperate to drum up a bit of aggro. Controversy equals audience figures and that makes the media world go round.

Hey, far from us at Darts World to take the high moral ground. We've all indulged and peddled some player verbal shenanigans, but only if it's genuine. Some of it is clearly said with a wry smile ramped up to be nasty. It's important to decipher the reality.

However, there's been no doubt the recent "rat" controversy from Michael van Gerwen and Gary Anderson "cowards" has been real.

MVG labelled Wright as "childish" during the Grand Slam.

The World No.1 had a dig at Snakebite who beat him in the final of last year's

showpiece final at the Alexandra Palace.

Wright recently said tongue-in-cheek that Van Gerwen had "no chance" of taking the trophy off his own mantelpiece.

MVG blasted Wright saying: "No one really believes him anymore. He says this when he doesn't have to say it. It's a bit childish. It's typical Peter, everyone knows it by now."

This is, arguably, the most open World Championship for years.

Van Gerwen, by his incredible standards, is nowhere near his dominant self and his rivals believe there is blood in the water. And the high-scoring sharks are circling.



OCH ICONS

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www.dartsworld.com



Gerwyn Price, most probably the best player in the world right now, has also questioned MVG's mentality.

When asked if he has the measure of the Dutchman, Price said: "I just think mentally. He's still got the game in there somewhere, he's just lacking the confidence."

"I'm sure that will still come out again, it's just when. Every time people are playing him now, especially me, I'm going out believing I'm going to win. Whereas maybe 18 to 24 months ago you were hoping you were going to win, the likelihood that you were going to lose."

"But now I believe 100 per cent if I bring my A game, it doesn't matter if it's Michael, Peter or anybody that I'm going to win. That's the difference. If you are full of confidence going on the stage then anything is possible."

After the top three of MVG, Wright and Price, there's a smorgasbord of tasty title pretenders.

Take your pick from Dimitri Van den Bergh, Nathan Aspinall, Michael Smith, Gary Anderson, Rob Cross, Daryl Gurney, Simon Whitlock, Devon Petersen or Damon Heta.

It would also be foolhardy to write off the best player never to have picked up the big one, James Wade.

The Aldershot hotshot has become the Ronnie O' Sullivan of the oche and certainly not afraid to speak his mind. It's refreshing and extremely enlightening at times.

Outspoken Wade has blasted the current state of the game and believes that Price is the best player in the world.

He said: "There's a lot of players that like to blow smoke up their own backsides but I don't think it's true. The standard isn't what it was, it's definitely a better standard throughout but the top 10/top 12, I think it's quite a long way off."

"As I said, Price is the best player in the world, apparently that stood out like a sore thumb."

"But you've only got to look at the averages in the games at the World Cup. It speaks for itself. I don't think it's as good as it was."

On the relentless PDC schedule towards the end of the year, he added: "It's going to be quite tough. It's something new, something different. It's a long time to be in the right frame of mind especially for the younger players who aren't as experienced and some of the older players who have got a lot of battle scars, you can find yourself in an awkward predicament."

"I think players who have a tremendous amount of high belief or self confidence I think they're the most fragile ones because they can go downhill very quickly."

"Especially the new generation, they're really confident which is a great thing to see but they can be the ones that are damaged quite badly."

If Wade is right, whoever prevails at the 2021 World Championship will be mentally strong and have to up their game.

As it is being held as the UK is still gripped by the Covid-19 pandemic, that adds a bit more spice to the brew.

It's going to be the most unique title race in history.

And also the first Championship for 30 years without a dominant force ruling the game.

The end result is fascinating anticipation, no doubt more plots and subplots than an Agatha Christie novel.

Perhaps the only thing predictable about 2020 will be the unpredictability.

## World Championship... What the pundits say:

### COLIN LLOYD:

#### THINK it's the most open Championship for some time.

Before the Grand Slam it always seemed to be about Peter Wright and Gerwyn Price. But there's so many people now coming into form.

James Wade is playing well, so it MVG. I just think it's got to a point now where it's the toss of a few coins now. It's impossible to pick.

That's what makes our game so fabulous. Phil Taylor was the dominant force then Michael took over but it's fair to say now that he is nothing like the force he was. So that means it'd wide open for the first time I can ever remember.

Nowadays you simply cannot take anyone lightly. Years ago you could have a first and second round and play yourself into the tournament. Now, no chance. Everyone is a threat.

I don't really subscribe to the crowd influence debate. If you are focused and you're on form, you don't hear the crowd anyway. You just hear like a humming or buzzing sound. If you're not focused on that little round thing from seven foot nine and a quarter, you shouldn't be playing the game.

If I'm going to be really pushed on a winner...I would love to see a world final between MVG and Price. It would be a case of who will break first.

### STUART PYKE:

#### WHEN Peter Wright dared to dream and finally fulfilled his darting destiny on January 1, 2020 who

could have known what was to come.

But here we are...a World Championship at the Alexandra Palace as a fitting finale to this turbulent

year. The PDC, players, officials and broadcasters have all made sure the sport hasn't just

survived but thrived during this traumatic time.

Some of the darts this year have been 'out of this world' as the big 'Major' tournaments were

played behind closed doors. The top darts stars have risen to the occasion but now it is time to

peak for the ultimate prize.

Predictably, the top three in the world will get most of the attention. Michael van Gerwen, Peter

Wright and Gerwyn Price all with big points to prove. But make no mistake, this World

Championship there for the taking.

Is it finally James Wade's time? Can Michael Smith win a 'Major' - the biggest one of them all? Will

De Sousa, Devon and Dimitri dazzle at the Palace?

Is everyone writing off the old warhorse Gary Anderson too soon? This is his stage.

Wide open...not that wide open! Van Gerwen is angry at his recent failures and inspired, Wright is

in the mood to make it back-to-back World crowns and Price is in the form of his life. So who will

win the Sid Waddell Trophy? For me, a certain Welshman gets the job done at the iconic Palace.



### MARK WEBSTER:

#### IT'S going to be fascinating.

The packed calendar leading up to the Worlds could be a vital factor. It can be a good or bad thing, if you're on form it's great but if you're having a bad spell like Glen Durrant, for instance, the events coming thick and fast is tough to deal with.

It's going to be special. The players are going to be chomping at the bit, there's a few debutants and players wanting to prove a point.

The likes of Devon Petersen wants to go there and make an impact. The usual suspects like Wright, Price, MVG, Gary Anderson will be expecting to be at the back end of the event.

It will be a different atmosphere that's for certain because of Covid-19.

That may suit an underdog. That's been proved by Dimitri Van den Bergh winning the Matchplay, it did suit him. He likes to be slow and methodical at times and that can get a crowd on your back.

I do think the World Champion could come out of the top four, that's for sure.

About a fortnight ago, I felt Wright or Price would be the favourites. But my gut tells me that Van Gerwen will do it. It would be typical of the man having not had one of his strongest years to go and nick the big one.

### LAURA TURNER:

#### IT'S the year of unpredictability...and why would the World Championships be any different?

Going into the event, there are the obvious front runners in Gerwyn Price, Michael Van Gerwen and Peter Wright. All have tasted success this year, but both MVG and Wright have wavered in events, with Price emerging as the inform player currently.

That said, there are some players who have thrived in the behind-closed-doors tournaments who can cause an upset to the status quo.

Dimitri Van den Burgh, Jose de Sousa, Devon Petersen, Simon Whitlock and Damon Heta are amongst a number of exciting players making big strides at the moment.

The likes of Glen Durrant and Gary Anderson don't seem to be 100 per cent fit, Michael Smith is still yet to get that elusive televised win although he is coming into a rich vein of form.

Obviously, I will have an eye firmly fixed on the progress of Lisa Ashton and Deta Hedman, but this year, depending on the draw, I think the title has more than an outside chance than ever going to the southern hemisphere in either Whitlock, Heta or Petersen.

# Laura TURNER



**THREE** days of darting drama at the Metrodome in Barnsley saw the outcome of the Women's Series determined by the smallest of margins as both Lisa Ashton and Deta Hedman topped the final tables to claim their places at the PDC World Championships.

Events one and three went the way of Lisa, with Deta winning event two and Fallon Sherrock taking the final event of the weekend. The trio's subsequent placing's over all the events saw Lisa top the Women's Series Order of Merit on £2,450, with both Deta and Fallon finishing joint second on £2,250.

It came down to just two legs on countback to split the two, with Deta winning 85 legs compared to Fallon's 83.

Desperately disappointing for the 'Queen of the Palace', who gained global recognition following her wins at the Ally Pally last year over Ted Evetts and Mensur Suljovic, but delight for Deta, who will now realise her dream when she debuts at the World Championships later this year.

Perhaps the icing on an already illustrious darting career, Deta remained remarkably consistent throughout the four events to hold onto her qualifying spot.

A haul of over 200 titles spanning more than 30 years, you can't but admire the tenacity and drive Deta has to keep pushing forward and remain an ever-present at the pinnacle of women's darts.

For Lisa, this will top off an incredible season which started back in January when she became the first woman to secure a tour card at Q-School.

Already, Lisa has had wins over the likes of Rob Cross and Michael Smith on the ProTour, a twice Grand Slam of Darts participant, she will want to consolidate the year with her first televised win since joining the PDC.

Lisa's 2018 PDC World Championship debut saw her storm into a one set lead against Jan Dekker, but unable to maintain the power-scoring of the first set throughout, she succumbed 3-1 in her opening match.

With the experience on the ProTour this year and more experience under her belt, she's aiming high at this year's Worlds.

The Women's Series injected a much needed boost, and one I am hopeful the PDC will emulate on a regular basis in the seasons to come.

Opportunities for women at the top-end of our sport are opening up and I am excited about the conversations happening about how to further develop and encourage growth to ensure the next generation of stars have a platform to hone their skills and showcase their talents.

**Laura Turner is No.9 in the BDO Ladies World rankings. She is also a TV pundit for Sky Sports.**

# OOCHE!

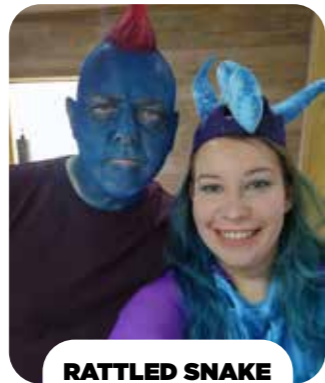
## gossip

**T**he most likeable and wackiest sports men and women on the planet have been up to their usual antics. It's been another dull month of Barney going classical, Willie in lederhosen, a blue Snake, a meaty Mike pie and Hollywood pants...



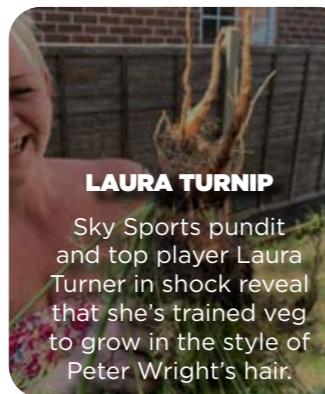
**STICKY DOG**

Scott Mitchell's audition for Airplane 1980 the re-make is going well. Lloyd Bridges famously said: "Looks like I picked the wrong week to quit sniffing glue." Scotty Dog has certainly got the right sticking power on the oche but needs to sort his hair gel out.



**RATTLED SNAKE**

Meltdown in Mendham as Peter Wright's latest hair colouring goes wrong after he asks daughter Naomi for a blue rinse.



**Laura Turnip**

Sky Sports pundit and top player Laura Turner in shock reveal that she's trained veg to grow in the style of Peter Wright's hair.



**WILLIE DEUTSCHLAND**

We are very concerned that young Scot 'Big' Willie Borland misunderstood his manager Matt Ward telling him to get prepared for the Euro Tour in Germany.



**DAZZA STINKER**

After finding out he's to follow Gary Anderson and Wesley Harms on stage, Darren Webster gets prepared.



**OH HARPY ARMY**

OK, so we all know that Raymondo was involved in some absolute classics down the years. But now he's turned classical musician? Ahh, so that's what he meant about a big come Bach.



**IT'S MEATY MIKE**

Who would have thought that Michael van Gerwen would have a pie designed after him. He definitely knows how to earn a decent crust. He's also a pukka guy.



**HAWAII FIVE BLOW**

The best darts TV pundit Wayne Mardle reveals latest coaching advice that shows players how to improve their throw without using hands.

**THONG ON THE TYNE**

There's nothing quite like having Hollywood's mug on your knickers. This is clearly the only department where Chris Dobe is truly pants. His crotch finishing is very impressive.



**RAPID EXIT**

This is actually Ricky Evans although we are worried that he doesn't need the Donald mask. The victory V-sign was clearly a bad decision.

# Nigel PEARSON



**T**HE PDC calendar has ended 2020 packed solid.

And as every match unfolds, another story is created. With the World Championship upon us, it has become a minefield to work out who will pick up the Sid Waddell Trophy.

Defending champ Peter Wright was sensational in the European Championship but well off his usual standard at the Grand Prix and Grand Slam. Michael van Gerwen is ominously starting to find his groove. You would expect him to hit peak MVG for the Worlds.

It is hard to argue that Gerwyn Price has been the best player in the world for the last couple of months. But there are so many other contenders. There's no way you could rule out the likes of Dimitri Van den Bergh, Glen Durrant and also my Sky Sports colleague Devon Petersen.

Not only that but James Wade, Simon Whitlock, Michael Smith and Gary Anderson - fitness permitting - look rejuvenated and always dangerous on the Worlds stage.

What has become clearly apparent is that so many top seeds are falling at first hurdles of tournaments. The lower reaches of ranked players are catching up with the top 10 and that just creates such a cracking situation of anything can happen.

But we now have three weeks of solid darts during Christmas. Just wonderful.

It is important to give huge kudos to Barry Hearn, Matt Porter and the PDC boys for salvaging the 2020 calendar.

For me it is totally ridiculous that fans can still not attend sporting events. But fair play to the PDC for ploughing on regardless.

The Euros, World Cup and Grand Slam have been hugely competitive events and gradually the surroundings are becoming less of an issue.

I have to say I really enjoy the World Cup. There were some cracking matches especially when it got down to the deciding pairs clashes. Gezzy and Jonny Clayton were a fabulous duo and totally deserving winners.

There's no doubt it was the best World Cup in PDC history and it was terrific to see what it meant to both Welsh players. This is now regarded as the prestigious tournament that a World Cup should always be.

It is also close to my heart that I make special comment for two of my dear Sky Sports colleagues.

Just a few days ago John Gwynne announced that he has a rectal tumour and will be undergoing intense hospital treatment over the next few months.

Gwynney is an absolute legend of the sport, one of the original commentators on Sky Sports along with Dave Lanning and then Sid Waddell.

His knowledge of the sport past and present is second to none and his voice synonymous with the classic matches down the years. I wish John all the very best and all the darts family is with him.

It also must be said that while darts is on our screens this Christmas, it won't quite be the same without Dave Clark.

Clarky is another legend and it's just nice to know that he can sit back, relax and watch the darts on the telly instead of having to work it!

**Nigel Pearson is a Sky Sports presenter and TalkSport and BT Sport commentator.**



# Romford, royalty and rock 'n' roll

THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF MIKE SHORER... 'BIG SID', FABERGE AND MICHELANGELO'S SISTINE CHAPEL

EXCLUSIVE WORDS: PHIL LANNING PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

**WHO has handled more trophies than any sportsman over the past 30 years?**

The names which come to mind are Phil Taylor, Stephen Hendry, Frankie Dettori, Sir Alex Ferguson.



But they are all wrong. It's Mike Shorer.

Yes, who, we hear you cry.

Shorer (pictured right) is the incredible jeweller who is celebrating his third decade of working for Barry Hearn as trophy maker for Matchroom and the PDC.

From the humble beginnings of Romford in Essex, Shorer has a quite extraordinary CV which includes producing work for The Queen, Princess Diana and Elton John and trophies lifted by the likes of Oasis, U2, Coldplay, Paula Radcliffe, Taylor and Hendry.

Shorer will see his 'Big Sid' World Championship lifted yet again next month and reveals in this exclusive interview that the original trophy was REJECTED after using the same marble as Michelangelo used in the Sistine Chapel!

He admits: "This is the 30th year I've done all the major trophies for Barry Hearn, I think I've done around 250 now. I used to work in a famous jewellers in Chelsea. But I got fed up sitting on a train for four hours commuting in and out of London from Essex.

"I started up my own business in 1990 in an old farm building in Abridge, Essex and to get new clients in I sent out 430 letters but only three replied, and one of them was Barry, being from Romford he was just around the corner.

"He got in touch and asked me to do a couple of trophies and they were huge. It was in the days when the sponsors would pay a lot of money in snooker in Asia. They were solid silver, enameled and engraved with the same pattern engraving machinery as Faberge used on his chocolate eggs!

"Barry absolutely loved them and ever since then I've done all the trophies in darts, snooker, fishing, pool, trick shot and 10-ball.

"I've done the World Championship darts trophies ever since it started with the PDC. I've also done 'Big Sid', which is what we call it. That's right next to me at the moment as we speak."

Shorer has a remarkable story, a family tale and curriculum vitae of A-listers that would make the red carpet at the Oscars look a tad ordinary.

He revealed: "I'm a seventh generation goldsmith, my family have been in this trade in England for about 275 years.

"We changed our name, we're originally from Alsace-Lorraine in Germany and had a German-sounding surname. My grandfather was a senior diamond cutter at Cartier, he changed the spelling



of the surname in 1937 because he could see what was going on.

"I've made pieces for most of the Royal Family. I presented one of my brooch commissions to Princess Anne a few months ago.

"When I worked in Chelsea we produced a lot of stuff for many Royal families, rock n rollers, sports and film stars. It was everything from wedding rings to little presents. The stuff we did for royals was mainly trophies. But we did wedding presents for the Yorks. I've worked on a few things for Princess Diana, Prince Charles plus the Queen and Prince Philip.

"I've also had a hand in making pieces for Elton John, he had outrageous stuff from us. The main thing I worked on was when he was Chairman of Watford, his manager John Reid wanted to



SHORE THING...  
Bono, Noel Gallagher,  
Stephen Hendry  
and Phil Taylor  
with trophies

get him a birthday present.

"We had four days to do a two-week job, we slept under the benches and just kept on going. It was a full-size Watford rosette with yellow diamonds, rubies, black sapphires and clear diamonds with a profile of Elton's head in the middle. So it was as if he was wearing a fan's rosette. It was huge.

"I've also made The Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy Awards. Coldplay, Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne, Oasis, Paul Weller, U2, the Eagles and many others all have trophies I have made on their mantelpiece."

In sporting terms, there is a special place in Shorer's heart for 'Big Sid'. He's done all the most recent creations, including the Premier League. But it also gives him sleepless nights.

He added: "My favourite piece in darts was definitely Big Sid. It's such an enormous over the top thing. When Barry commissioned me to do it he said he wanted Sid's signature on it, he wanted it big and he wanted it noticed.

"It took a lot of making. The globe on the top is eight inches in diameter, solid silver and I had to hand engrave all the countries of the world on it.

"I'm usually working on about 10 jobs at once but the Sid Waddell Trophy start to finish took three weeks. To get all the angles right and the texturing, engraving is very detailed and time consuming.

"The one you see now isn't the original. The first one I wanted to include some of the colours of the dartboard.

"Barry had asked for some granite on the plinth, which is black. I thought it would be nice to have some red marble, the middle part was the same marble Michelangelo used in the Sistine Chapel, such a

beautiful red.

"I presented it to Barry and he picked it up and said it's too heavy. It was 23 kilos. It was decided that, it looked fantastic, but logistically it was too heavy for players to pick up. So we had to re-make it!

"Barry has a discussion with Matt Porter and Dave Allen within the PDC. They tell me what the competition is and they'll give me a budget to work to. That's how I work with all my corporate clients.

"I never do a cup with two handles. They just get dusty and they don't say anything about the competition or the sponsor.

"There's a huge amount of pride in what I do, reflected glory when I see event winners, award winners and World Champions pick up my trophies at their greatest moment. The adrenalin rush is massive.

"But that also comes with responsibility. I have to submit several designs to Barry and Matt. There's a bit of to-ing and fro-ing with tweaks. Over the years I got to know what they like in their trophies.

"However it does scare me witless. I've been known to wake up at four in the morning. Being a jeweller I worry about something being a tenth of a millimetre out.

"Everything has got to be absolutely perfect. I really worry about them a lot. I even put gloves and instructions in the packing case of how to handle them. I keep on worrying about them like they are my little babies."

In just a few days another player will lift 'Big Sid'

A trophy that even the perfection of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel couldn't be a part of.

It's a pure work of dart.

[www.mikeshorerjewellery.com](http://www.mikeshorerjewellery.com)

## ANDERSON LASHES OUT AT "COWARDS"



WORDS: PHIL LANNING

**GARY ANDERSON lashed out at players who he claims use gamesmanship as "cowards" after qualifying for the Grand Slam knockout stages.**

The Flying Scotsman stormed out of a Sky Sports interview on day one of the tournament following an opening clash with Czech youngster Adam Gawlas.

Ando, 49, blasted about "cheating" in the game and continued to hit out at rival stars who he says are "pathetic". He said: "At the end of the day it's probably aimed at a hell of a lot of players to be honest. But like they say, it doesn't happen. That's what gets on my goat.

"If you're going to do something just say I did and it worked. Fair dos, end of argument, well done I'll know the next time what to expect.

"It's pathetic. You know what, I wish I could do it. Even Tommy will tell you, he says do it back, I can't. I cannot do it back because it's not the game.

"There's certain things they do that I'm not going to get into, it seems to be the same thing at the same time. So it's obviously going about isn't it?

"It just makes me weak in the head because I'm listening to them. It's one of these things. I don't do it to people, I don't expect it to get done to me. You'll see the rest of them, they'll have a wee niff at somebody, so be it. But if they do it, they're not dart players, they're just cowards. That's a simple fact, you can quote me on that.

"I'm the one who says it and I'm the one who gets my backside chewed for it. Because the rest of them can't speak up for themselves.

"If you are doing something wrong face up to it, have a pair of jewels!

"I used to play darts and a boy go up on the stage and hit a 180 and you'd say 'great darts', you'd actually say to them 'good darts buddy'.

"To me that was gamesmanship. Now, no."

Anderson beat Ryan Searle to qualify from his group for the 14th successive year in the Slam despite hobbling with a knee injury.

He added: "If I got beat I was going home. I think that's what might have helped me.

"Listen it's a knee at the end of the day, there's people with a lot worse problems than a sore knee.

"If I take time off I'm back to square one. Probably just better dragging along until the Worlds.

"I've had bad knees for years but the last four weeks have been ridiculous. I just started to get the pain again in my knee.

"Two weeks ago I had the x-ray which I've still not heard nothing about. Lost in the post.

"It's actually making me sweat like I've been working."

In an astonishing live TV interview with Michael Bridges just three days earlier, Ando claimed "snarking" and "sniffing" from opponents on stage.

He blasted: "It's nice to play darts. You get players that snark in your ear everytime you throw, always seems to come from the same team. It gets on your nerves a bit.

"So would I pull out yeh, darts isn't darts anymore. You need to have a word with everyone who watches darts. Call it gamesmanship, I call it cheating and I'll see them there when I go through.

"Ask a lot of players, they don't say anything, I'll say something. If they're all sniffing they better get their test again. That's the way I look at it."

Anderson is never far from controversy at the Grand Slam. Two years ago he was involved in the ill-tempered final with Gerwyn Price and the infamous 'Fartgate' incident after playing Wesley Harms.

# “When I’m playing well and the blood is boiling, that’s just me, it comes out and I can’t control it.”

PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

We put the feisty and fiery Welsh together. When Radio X presenter and top darts female reporter Polly James met Gerwyn Price....

**PJ: We are talking just as Glen Durrant has tested positive for Covid-19. Will you self-isolate to protect yourself as we approach the World Championships?**

GP: Obviously Glen is coming from one of the hotspots where Covid is so I wish him well and hope he recovers pretty sharpish. I think it's going to streak through most of us at some stage. Fingers crossed I don't get it.

I've spoken to a few players about it and I think you've just got to be responsible and stay at home and don't go out if you don't need to. Especially leading up to the Worlds I think I'm going to get to London a week early and self-isolate in a room on my own just to make sure I'm right for the tournament.

My daughters have got a couple of weeks off school which helps. That means they're not in and out and mixing with other kids.

But there's only so much you can do to try and keep this away. But eventually I think most people are going to get it.

It's about being responsible. Like supermarkets for only one in a household to go out.

**PJ: I've spoken to a lot of people who have been isolating during**

**lockdown and they've been delighted to see darts back on TV to have some live sport to watch.**

GP: Darts has been a sport that you can do with social distancing with only two people on the oche and one referee. It has been a sport that could get underway in these difficult times.

I'm not too sure about the Home Tour but especially the other events that are put on TV and livestream, I'm sure it's going to cheer up some people's days. Even I like to watch when I'm away so I can see what's going on.

It's good that we are bringing some sort of joy and helping other people out as well.

**PJ: Massive congratulations on winning the BoyleSports Grand Prix and leapfrogging Peter Wright into the World No.2 place. You must be delighted to have cracked a format you didn't previously like?**

GP: The format was never my cup of tea. But being behind closed doors and not having the distractions that I did last year sort of helped as well.

When I played the second game, I sort of found my feet, found a bit of confidence. I never thought I was going to lose apart from one time against Chizzy. He let me off!

**PJ: Are you in the penthouse suite in the hotel now you're World No.2?**

GP: We don't stay in the poshest of hotels but it does the job! I've got my Firestick and my darts, that's all I need.

No perks from being World No.2. I'm the furthest room away in the hotel right now, I thought I might get next to the lifts. Since being No.2 I've been verified on Instagram, so happy days!

**PJ: You are the most in-form player in the world right now, but do you**



“But now I believe 100 per cent if I bring my A game, it doesn't matter if it's Michael, Peter or anybody that I'm going to win.”

**feel you're at 100 per cent?**

GP: Definitely not, I know I've still got an abundance in the bag. Especially in the Grand Prix I think I scraped through most of the games, especially the final I didn't perform well. That seems to be what I've become over the last couple of years, my B and C game is good enough. I think there's a lot more in the bag. I haven't reached my full potential yet.

**PJ: Do you still feel you are "pinching money out of players' pockets"?**

GP: I can remember that quote. It was just a little dig at a few of the players. But if I'd have lost that final in the Grand Prix, the shoe would have been on the other foot.

I haven't been playing long, only six or seven years so I'm still new to this game. Give me another six years and I'll have a few world titles under my belt and a lot more majors.

**PJ: MVG has dominated for a long time, whoever knocks him off his perch will be a big deal. Is that something you are truly chasing?**

GP: If Michael goes out of the Worlds early or if me or Peter wins the tournament I think either Peter or me will be World No.1. I don't think anyone else can take that spot off Michael, just me or Peter. I'm just hoping I can have a good run and put some pressure on them both at the end of this year. If I become World No.1, what a story that would be.

**PJ: Have you got the measure of MVG these days?**

GP: I just think mentally. He's still got the game in there somewhere, he's just lacking the confidence. I'm sure that will still come out again, it's just when. Every time people are playing him now, especially me, I'm going out believing I'm going to win. Whereas maybe 18 to 24 months ago you were hoping you were going to win, the likelihood was that you were going to lose. But now I believe 100 per cent if I bring my A game, it doesn't matter if it's Michael, Peter or anybody that I'm going to win. That's the difference. If you are full of confidence going on the stage then anything is possible.

**PJ: Passion on stage is a big thing?**

GP: Over the years I've been scrutinised for it. It comes out in every player even sometimes more so than me. You see it with Michael van Gerwen all the time, Nathan Aspinall, Jermaine Wattimena. I just seem to have a little bit more sometimes. Without that game and fire, same with Nathan and without crowds, it's just not the same.

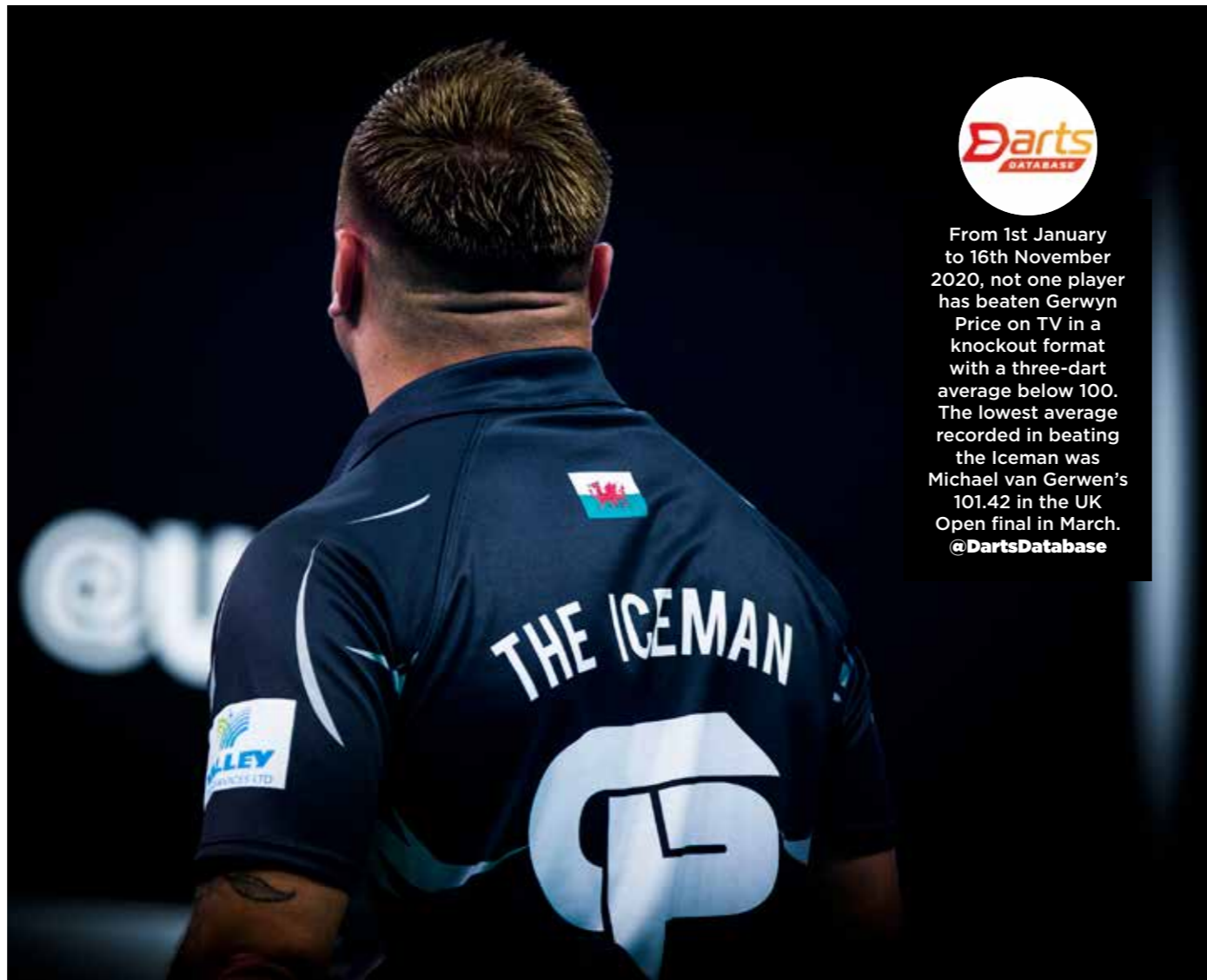
I've tried to change but you've just got to be what you are. You can't just try and please people. You've got to go out and do what you do.

**PJ: Are the days of the Green Machine MVG coming to an end? Is there a new generation coming through?**

GP: I don't think it's the fact that Michael's gone really bad. I just think that the standard of the players, in depth right through the PDC, has risen. We've had to catch Michael up. I certainly think there's a few players who have caught him up and there's a lot more boys who are going to get there pretty soon as well.

**PJ: You could be World No.1 soon but can you remember the first money you won at darts?**

GP: I was still playing rugby down in Neath for Cross Keys and I was going to local tournaments. I would look on the internet for £500 local tournaments, cash-in, cash-out and I was winning the majority of them. Just to go and pick up £300, £500 and



From 1st January to 16th November 2020, not one player has beaten Gerwyn Price on TV in a knockout format with a three-dart average below 100. The lowest average recorded in beating the Iceman was Michael van Gerwen's 101.42 in the UK Open final in March. @DartsDatabase

knowing that these boys were playing county yet I was playing rugby most of the time. I was actually pinching money off them.

**PJ: When did you think I could do this darts thing full-time?**

GP: I don't think it was about the money. I'd never played over a longer format but in the Matchplay I turned Michael Smith over and lost to Peter Wright in the quarters or semis. That was the turning point. I then believed I belonged in the PDC and knew that I could earn a living. But winning the Grand Slam and £125,000, that was a nice cheque to take home and probably put a bit more belief in me that I was one of the top boys.

**PJ: Many saw this year's Grand Slam as your two-year Gary Anderson fisticuffs anniversary which ultimately you had to pay the price for. You felt you had a target on your back and the other players tried to rile you. Has that feeling gone now?**

GP: I still get a little boos and whistles. It is difficult at certain points in games especially when it's coming down to doubles and winning matches.

To be honest I don't regret anything that went on in that tournament because it's probably made me into the player I am. The crowds and everything on my back has just moulded me into one of the best players in the world.

If I hadn't played the way I did and done what I did, I still think I did nothing wrong. If I hadn't had the crowd on my back for the last two years, would I be the player I am now? I don't think I would.

**PJ: What is the one thing that makes you very angry on the oche? What gets the blood boiling which would typically cause a social media rant after the game?**

GP: If I'm playing poor then you don't see that side of me. I don't get myself into the game, I can't get the aggression out. But when I'm playing well and the blood is boiling, that's just me, it comes out and I can't control it.

I can't put my finger on why it comes out or why I'm that way. It's just natural.

**PJ: Even Hollywood actor Matthew McConaughey tweeted about you...**

GP: My wife mentioned that some actor has tweeted me and I didn't have a clue who he was. Once she showed me a picture I knew. I'm rubbish with names. I know him now anyway!

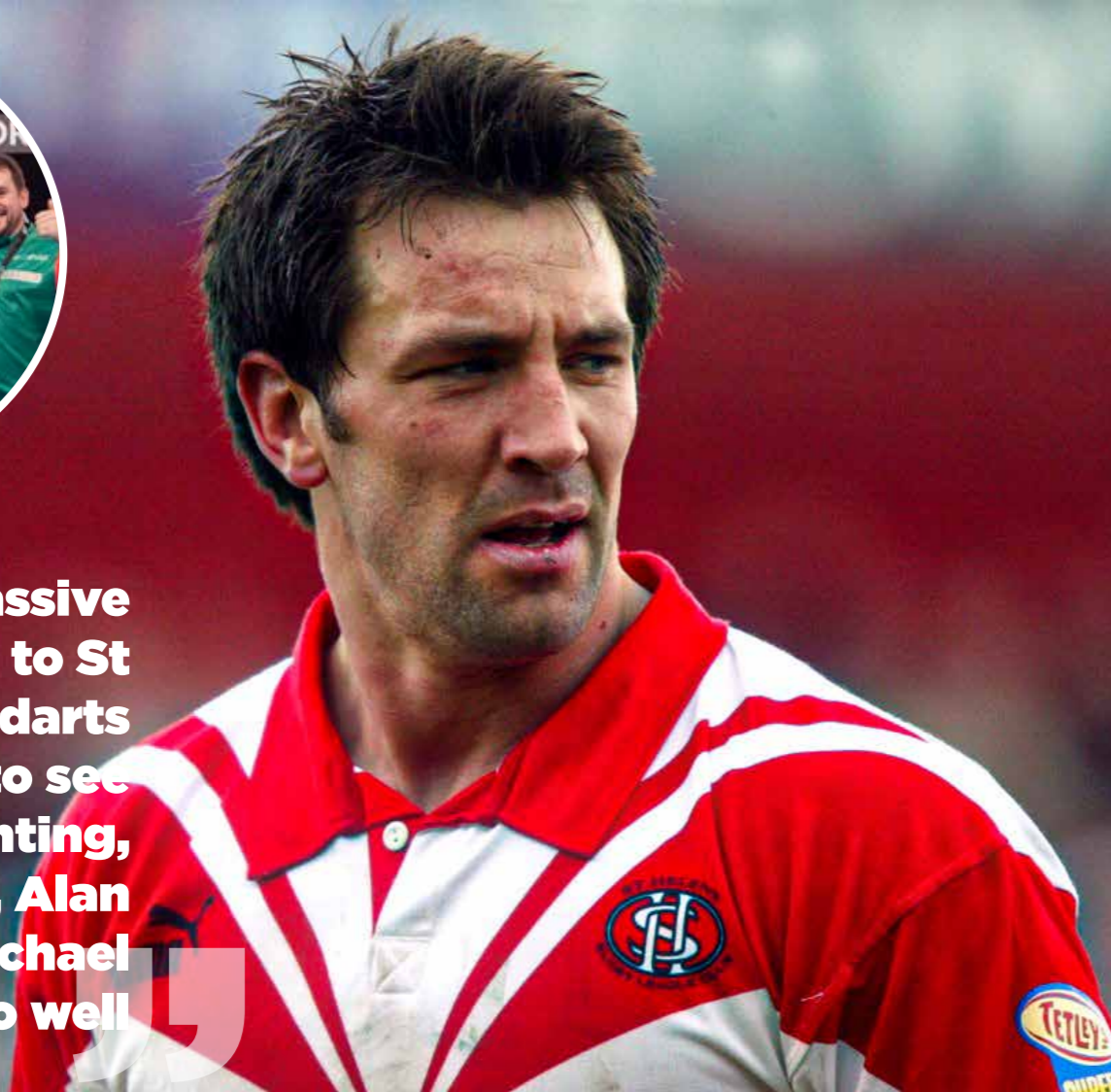
**PJ: What would you prefer. Wales rugby World Cup win or World Cup of Darts?**

GP: Depends if I'm playing! If I'm playing for Wales, then rugby all the way. I'd give up everything to pull that jersey on and run out at the Millennium Stadium in front of 80,000 people. I'd love that.

Trophies don't mean much to me because I'm from a rugby background. But if I was to pick up the rugby World Cup that would mean a lot more to me than to pick up the world title in darts. Even though I'd still love to do that!

# RUCKstars

Scully on the rugby mentality ruling the oche



“There is a massive connection to St Helens with darts so I like to see Stephen Bunting, Dave Chisnall, Alan Tabern and Michael Smith do well”

WORDS: PAUL WOODAGE

**IT'S no surprise to regularly see sporting personalities and celebrities at the darts. You will often spot some very famous faces in the crowd, including Prince Harry!**

In the world of rugby league, Paul Sculthorpe is royalty. The highly-decorated Lancashire legend has won everything in the game and been awarded an MBE for his services to rugby league and charity work.

Scully began his career in 1994 at Warrington but it was at St Helens he

made a huge name for himself.

In a glittering career spanning over a decade he won multiple league and cup honours. To this day Sculthorpe remains the only man to have won back to back 'Man of Steel' awards which recognises the Rugby League Player of the Year.

In 2013, Paul Sculthorpe was honoured by the Queen and received an MBE. His continuing proud work for the Steve Prescott Foundation is well documented. The charity was set up in 2007 by the former rugby player who sadly lost his life following pioneering transplant surgery to

cure the cancer.

A lot of well known darting personalities have all participated in fund raising events for the foundation including Wayne Mardle, Bobby George, Rod Studd, James Wade, Stephen Bunting and Dave Chisnall. There has always been a close connection between the two sports and Sculthorpe has always been a fan of the arrows.

He admitted: "My interest in darts began when I was as a kid. Always watched darts with my mum and dad from an age back in the Bristow, Lowe and Jocky



Wilson days.

"I enjoy watching the darts on TV. I've been to quite a few of the Premier League nights, Ally Pally and the Winter Gardens. Stuart Pyke is a good friend and has often looked after me for tickets. Loads of the rugby lads love a night at the darts, Sean Long, Martin Gleeson, Jon Wilkin and Paul Wellens to name a few.

"A number of us had one great night in Manchester backstage with all the darters which included the late great Wigan player Terry Newton.

"I'm also good friends with Dion Dublin who is another massive darts fan. I went along with him and a load of mates to the World Championships last year at Ally Pally.

"There is a board in my local so I often have a game with the lads when I go in there. If there is a group of us we usually end up playing killer. When I was at Saints we had a dartboard up in the training ground so after our session we would regularly have a few games and competitions amongst us. I won now and again!

"I'm a fan of most sports, it's the competitive edge of being a professional. Love golf too and play a fair bit.

"Michael van Gerwen and Gerwyn Price are great to watch at the moment. There is a massive connection to St Helens with darts so I like to see Stephen Bunting, Dave Chisnall, Alan Tabern and Michael Smith do well."

It's no coincidence that darts players are often very good at other sports. There are many qualities both mentally and physically that are necessary to excel. Strength of mind is always highlighted as a vital factor to success and never tested more so than this year.

He added: "Many professional sports people have good hand eye co-ordination so can cross sports. A lot of rugby lads are good golfers because of this as they have precise movement skills. Gerwyn Price has taken it to the next level though. I am very keen on boxing

and have had a few bouts since retiring from rugby.

"Even today I am extremely competitive whatever I play. It's just part of the person I am and the life I've always lived throughout my rugby career. I play the odd charity game and still want to win every time I step on the field.

"Mental strength is very important, more so more than ever in this difficult world we live with the Covid-19 pandemic.

"My brother is a huge advocate of this and currently works within the NHS along with the State of Mind Foundation promoting mental health and well-being and the importance of opening up if struggling.

"He always says prevention is better than cure. It's a difficult time for many people right now, and I believe exercise too is so important for both the body and mind. It's so frustrating to see the closure of all gyms and golf courses, places that can be safely used, but also have major effects on people's health and well-being. You can walk around a golf course with a dog but not a club!

"I appreciate there are people who take advantage of the rules but for a lot golf is an escape. If done safely, closure of the club house, online bookings, non-use of buggies, same household it can be done safely I've no doubts.

"Being away from home for long periods can be difficult mentally for professional sports people, I'm sure the darters will back me up here ..especially those with young families.

"I played internationals for 10 years with Great Britain, touring the likes of Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea for weeks on end. However, they were great times and something I'd do all over again, and I am thankful I had such a supporting family."

With just the big one left to go it looks like the World Championships will sadly be played behind closed doors. But it won't stop millions, including Scully, from tuning in.

## RUSS BRAY

**F**IRST and foremost, I hope everyone is fit and well and keeping safe.



What a fabulous couple of months of darts we have had, especially with the world in the current state it is in.

I have been involved with the Premier League, International Darts Championships, European Darts Championships, World Cup of Darts and as I write this, the Grand Slam here in Coventry. And a tasty little side line, there was also the HomeTour and Autumn Series streamed to our computers and tablets.

I'll start with the Premier League finals at the Ricoh Arena in Coventry which saw Glen Durrant make his first PDC TV title win with a 11-8 victory over Nathan Aspinall, having beaten Gary Anderson in the semi final with a last leg 10-9 victory. Nathan got to the final with a 10-7 win over current World Champion Peter Wright. Considering there was no crowd, the atmosphere and the standard of darts was superb.

My next tournament took me out to Germany for the International Darts Open in Reisa, which also saw the newly crowned Prem League Champ Glen Durrant miss out having provided a positive covid test.

There were some fabulous darts thrown as you would expect, especially from Ross Smith, who recorded a first round average of 112.80, he then took out the very in-form Gerwyn Price 6-5 the next day. He then went on to beat Germany's Max Hopp before losing to the eventual Champion Joe Cullen in the Quarters. It was good to be calling with a crowd, albeit only 250 allowed, but it made it feel like a little normality was coming back.

The following weekend I flew back to Germany for the European Championships in Oberhausen. Again we had a small crowd which again made the atmosphere. The first day saw perfection thrown from Portugal's Jose De Sousa in his win over Jeffrey De Zwaan.

The second round saw a few interesting results with World champ Peter Wright taking out Gerwyn Price, Ian White beating MVG and Steve West taking a nail biting last leg 10-9 win over Mensur Suljovic. The quarters the following day ran pretty much to form setting up Wade/Petersen and Wright Clayton semi finals. Two smashing close fought semis saw World Champ Peter Wright take on James Wade. Peter won 11-4 in a one sided final in becoming the European Champion.

More travelling on the next weekend, saw me calling at the World Cup of Darts in Salzburg in Austria. Again a smashing tournament which saw all first round matches as best of 9 pairs, which I really enjoy, not only calling but watching too. I am a fan of the pairs format. The tournament itself pretty much ran to form, with Wales although not the No.1 seeds (England), were favourites to win. After a very entertaining couple of days, the final was between England and Wales. The Welsh boys of Gerwyn Price and Johnny Clayton, proved a little bit too much for the England duo of Rob Cross and Michael Smith, becoming World Cup Champions with a 3-0 victory.

After the Grand Slam it's the Players Championship and then Worlds. No rest which is great! Please stay safe and chat soon.

**Russ Bray, PDC referee.**

**In association with Unicorn and William Hill.**

# HGV to 180

**“I had to have a look at myself, I’m working harder, and I feel a lot more mentally strong as well.”**



The percentage of legs won by Ross Smith in 15 darts or less has been increasing year-on-year since 2018. He now sits 22nd on the Tour on this metric. @DartsDatabase

was only beaten by eventual champion Joe Cullen), suggests Smith is back on the right track.

Cullen himself admitted after taking the second European Tour title of his career that Smith may well have been the man to beat that weekend in Riesa, after a series of stunning displays that took him to the last eight.

He added: “That’s a massive compliment. When the champion says that, I have to take that on board. But I have to forget those runs because at the end of the day I didn’t win (the tournaments).”

“I’ve watched a lot of other players’ interviews and you have to change your mentality. I don’t just want to be there to make the numbers up, I want to start winning these tournaments - like Joe - getting further and going into the later stages of events.”

“I want to push for a top 16 spot and really want to kick-on in my career over the next few years.”

He has produced standout moments: a Lakeside quarter-final back in 2011, the first

broadcast nine dart leg on the Euro Tour in Gibraltar 2013, and a sensational victory over Michael van Gerwen at last year’s European Championship.

Sky Sports darts analyst and Good Darts Podcast co-host Wayne Mardle thinks the only thing that is holding Smith back, like quite a few other players, is the ability to produce those moments more regularly.

Mardle said: “I think a lot of players get confused between getting better and becoming more consistent. He’s a brilliant player and everyone knows that. I think if he can be more confident for longer spells, I think you could see him go up a couple of levels.”

There was a temporary hiatus, but the second coming of Ross Smith could yet fulfill the immense promise of his early days in professional darts.

**\*Ross was talking to The Good Darts Podcast with Dan Dawson and Wayne Mardle, available weekly on various podcast providers and at [gooddarts.captivate.fm](http://gooddarts.captivate.fm)**

## PRICE: WORLD CUP IS “PROUDEST MOMENT”



WORDS: PHIL LANNING

**G**ERWYN PRICE has hailed the BetVictor World Cup of Darts triumph for Wales as the “proudest moment” of his career.

Price and team-mate Jonny Clayton became the fourth nation to taste World Cup glory over the past decade since the tournament was introduced, as they defeated England 3-0 in the final in Salzburg.

World No.3 Price has claimed two Grand Slam of Darts titles as well as recently winning the World Grand Prix and World Series of Darts titles, but was unable to hold back his emotion after claiming World Cup glory.

Price said: “I’ve won a couple of majors but to win this with Jonny is the proudest moment of my darting career,” said Price.

“Hitting that winning double and the emotions outweigh every trophy I’ve won, even playing rugby and winning trophies there, it feels extra special today.”

“The rugby is still close to me but this feels better than every tournament I’ve won.”

The Welsh pair KO’d defending champs Scotland before beating Australia and Germany to reach the final and comfortably see off England.

He added: “I was full of confidence and I’m sure Jonny was as well.”

“Jonny came into the event on the back of a semi-final last week in the European Championship and a final on the European Tour before that, and I’ve been playing well over the last 12 to 18 months.”

“It’s good getting to finals, but to win and pick up trophies is extra special.”

“I just dug deep in that final and got over that winning line. This is the most special one and it’s emotional. It’s a fantastic moment, not just for me and Jonny but for the rest of Wales as well.”

Price has enjoyed a superb year on the circuit and showed his class throughout the World Cup to be unbeaten in all four Singles games he played.

“I’ve got a lot of belief and confidence at the moment,” he admitted.

“We can all throw darts but it’s just believing in yourself. I was throwing first so I wanted to get out of the blocks, put the other team under pressure and win that first game.”

“It’s not as easy as it sounds but I was doing it pretty well and it was good for me; it took a little bit of pressure off Jonny too sometimes.”

“We put other teams under pressure, especially against England in the final. Going 2-0 up and having played so well in the Pairs in the previous rounds, I was quite confident.”

Clayton admits the win was a “dream come true”, adding: “It’s excellent - this means the world. We’re proud Welshmen and to beat England in the final as well, we’re very proud.”

“The old Wales-England rivalry is massive in any sport you play, so to win that against England is a dream come true. It’s a phenomenal feeling.”

“I was coming into the tournament with the best player in the world and I just wanted to try and play to my ability.”

“I struggled in the first couple of days but came good at the end, so I’m chuffed to bits.”

“I had the No.3 in the world next to me and it made my job a little bit easier because he was brilliant. I take my hat off to him, he’s absolute class.”

## Smith’s road to glory hits the fast lane...

### THE DAN DAWSON INTERVIEW

**W**HEN the PDC first introduced a youth system, Ross Smith was among the leading lights. He was young, talented, with a beautiful throw, and had the knack of winning things.

In 2013 ‘Smudger’ claimed four titles across the 18 Challenge Tour events, the forerunner to nowadays Development Tour.

That tally was more than any other player, including multiple title winners Benito van de Pas and Josh Payne, as well as the current World Matchplay champion Dimitri Van den Bergh.

Unlike those names though, Smith walked away from the game just three years later, taking a two-year break from the sport. It was not clear whether he would be seen on the PDC circuit again.

Smith told The Good Darts Podcast: “It was a number of things.



I’d just had my son and I wanted to spend more time at home, but some silly little things as well.

“I wanted a lads’ holiday because I’d never had one in my whole life; I even just wanted to play Sunday league football and watch a bit of football - normal things.”

The first phase of Ross’s career saw him juggling darts, his personal life and working as a lorry driver. He nearly lost that job when he made his first major quarter-final at the 2019 UK Open, but he has now decided to concentrate solely on his darting career.

He added: “I knew I’d had far too much time off work through darts, so I had no idea whether I’d be asked when I got back to work to choose between one and the other... which obviously is a no-brainer - I’m really happy I took that decision to take the darts on.”

The change in circumstances also led to a change in attitude, with Smith working on his physical fitness in an effort to find

the extra level he needs to reach the top.

He said: “I think I got a few things out of my system, I needed that break away, and when I came back I wanted to be fitter and to approach the game better. I felt like I wasted a lot of years playing the game. I looked at other players similar to my age and they’ve all kicked-on, why haven’t I?”

“No disrespect to them, but I grew up with a lot of the lads - even those who have played in the Premier League. I feel like I’ve been held back in my career while they’ve gone on to better things, and it suddenly gives you a kick up the backside to tell you ‘you can do this as well - there’s nothing stopping you’.

“I had to have a look at myself, I’m working harder, and I feel a lot more mentally strong as well.”

Four ranking quarter-finals this year for Smith, including a superb tournament average of almost 100 at the recent International Darts Open (where he

# 70

## The Menace at

**W**IDELY-recognised as an important part of the revolution of darts, Dennis Priestley was a pivotal figure in changing the sport into how we know it today.

In the 90s the game of darts was changing and about to go through a historical period which would eventually propel the sport from a pub pastime into a global attraction.

It was well documented that in the late 80s a pressure group called the Darts Council was formed consisting of the top players in the game and their agents. Concerns were rising by the lack of television coverage darts was receiving.

In total 16 players pulled away from the BDO to form their own organisation known as the World Darts Council. As many had turned professional during the 80s the sole intention was to prominently bring the game back to television screens and generate more prize money.

The Yorkshireman was one of the founding members of the WDC which would eventually turn into the darting juggernaut we now know as the PDC.

Recent circumstances with the Covid-19 pandemic have meant that Matt Porter and co have had to steer the ship through some very choppy waters.

Always measured in his response, the calm giant Priestley admits: "What the PDC board have done in recent years has been excellent. There is more money involved now and it's on a par with snooker.

"I think they have done extremely well under the circumstances. Obviously it was important to carry on with the Matchplay and that brings in a vital revenue from Sky but they will miss the money they generated from bums on seats.

"They have some set aside so can ride the storm for the time being."

Sadly Priestley lost a very close friend to the virus earlier in the year. Trevor Jones lost his battle with Covid-19 in April and, to the Priestley family, he was much more than just a driver. He was a very dear friend.

He added: "It was devastating to receive the news. He was a great friend and always a constant support. I probably would have retired much earlier if Trevor had decided to give up driving me. I really miss him and it's

## Priestley on chickens, punditry and the demise of BDO

WORDS: PAUL WOODAGE

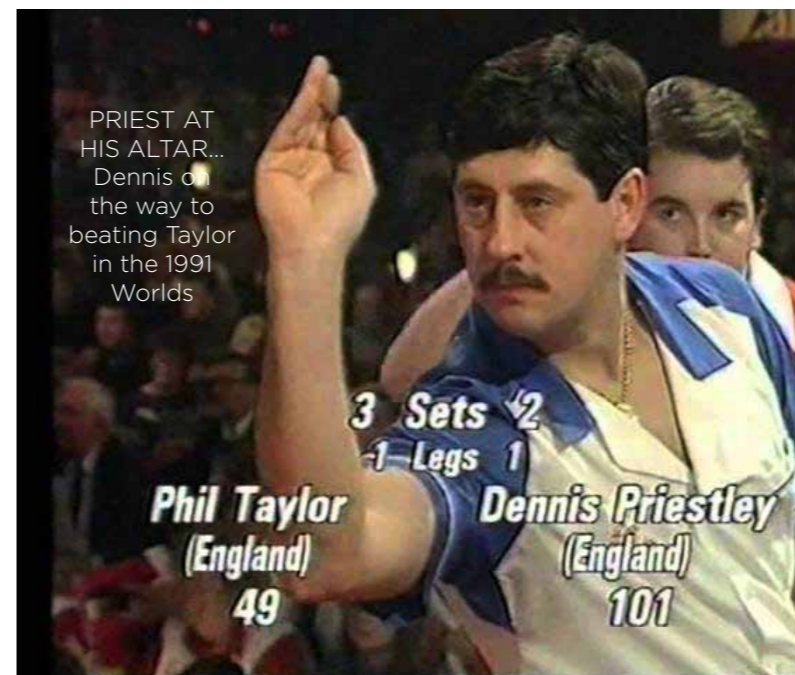
so important to have that one constant person you trust by your side."

The Menace has had his own well publicised health worries. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2007 and had to have his prostate removed. Now he enjoys quality time with his family and the ex-World Champ shares a hobby with the current one, Peter Wright. They both keep chickens.

He added: "I regularly nip down the back of the garden to collect the eggs with my two-year-old granddaughter, she absolutely loves it."

Recently turning 70, the Mexborough man still takes a keen interest in darts although admits to 'flicking back and forth' as opposed to being an avid viewer.

He continued: "I do tend to channel hop but I keep an eye on what's going on. I enjoy watching good darts and different



styles, players such as Adie Lewis and Michael Smith.

"I was delighted to see Dimitri van den Bergh win the World Matchplay as I worked with him 18 months ago at an exhibition and I found him to be a really nice friendly lad, huge talent too.

"It's great to see other nationalities coming through and winning big events. Krzysztof Ratajski is a player I like and Mensur Suljovic too. They give the PDC a strong European feel."

Priestley takes a strong interest in other sports too and in particular follows anything his country are involved in.

He added: "I always follow England no matter what it is but I do enjoy cricket and soccer. Barnsley are my local team but I have followed Manchester United for years, however when they meet I have to go for Barnsley."

Asked whether he was ever interested in management, the response is a firm no. However, it's a shame The Menace doesn't appear on our screens as a pundit.

He said: "They never asked me. Maybe I am not eloquent enough with my Yorkshire accent. But if they asked me in the morning it's something I would love to do of course."

Having had such an illustrious career, Priestley was also sad to see the demise of the BDO, adding: "Olly Croft should have taken the million that Barry Hearn put on the table that time to buy the BDO out.

"I was at an event with their current champion, Wayne Warren in February at the O2 and it was a day

before the deadline for his winnings to be paid in full but sadly he never received it."

Since Fallon Sherrock's heroics in the Ally Pally last year, the rise in publicity for Women's darts has rocketed. It's something Priestley is pleased to see happening and he thinks that the Women's Series in Barnsley was great for the sport.

He added: "When I was playing there were some extremely talented female players. The likes of Linda Batten, Mandy Solomon and even Deta Hedman were around back then so the level has always been high and it's good to see the women getting the opportunities to qualify for the big TV events."

So what now for the Yorkshire legend?

He concluded: "Family is very important so spending as much time with my wife, four children and two grandchildren will always be my priority.

"I do like to keep active and before lockdown I was doing up a house with roofing and brickwork. I still keep in touch with the lads and am available for exhibitions.

"Last year I was fortunate enough to work in China with John Lowe and was also with him and Bob Anderson in Tenerife back in March. I hope to carry on doing a fair bit on the exhibition circuit when things get back to normal as it's something I always enjoy and great to catch up with the lads."

For now though Priestley is enjoying semi-retirement, but if Sky or ITV just happen to be looking for a guest pundit, then he would very much welcome the call.

## DEVON PETERSEN



**W**HAT a contrast this year has been.

It has been a few months to really test the character of every sportsman across the globe.

In darts, it's been no different.

We first of all had a sudden patch of months off. Then it's been back to full speed, no fans, fake crowd noise and a solid calendar.

That has presented all sorts of different challenges for every player.

Being stuck in a bubble at tournaments isn't much fun. Initially it's tricky being away from the family for such a huge amount of time. That got to me a bit at the recent Grand Slam, I got a bit emotional especially being a new dad.

The other extra element that adds is that you can stew in your own mind on defeats. There's no break from that pressure.

For instance we've just had three successive weeks on the go. You don't get any distraction and downtime from the psychological difficulties of defeat.

That means you have mental and physical fatigue. I think that has really got to a few players. You heard them talk about it at the Premier League, that day-in, day-out pressure cooker sent a few of the boys a bit stir crazy.

Instead of the normal calendar, it's been stop and then full-on. That's a new dynamic for all of us. And to be truthful, only the really mentally strong will deal with the change to practice routines and performing on stage.

I have found my own methods of dealing with different situations. I've now got the best back-up team any dart player has in the sport to help me.

To be honest I've been far too inconsistent over the past few weeks. That has been frustrating to say the least. I started the Grand Slam pretty good with wins over Ian White, Dirk van Duijvenbode and Peter Wright.

But then I started far too slowly against Damon Heta in the last 16 and got punished. I did get back into it, it was too late though.

That underlines the standard these days. There are so many players who are stepping it up, taking their opportunities. Trust me, it's dog eat dog up there!

I feel that all the boys are finding it tough to adapt now. Even the elite players are showing inconsistencies. Darts is more of a level playing field than it has ever been. That's great news for fans, it's unpredictable.

Personally, I have the best structure and balance than I've ever had in my career. I feel very strong. Now it's just making little tweaks along the way, understanding how my game is evolving. The advice I get from the former players I work with is priceless.

It's up to me in the end to deliver the final performance on the stage.

I'm in a very good place as we go towards the World Championship. I know if I produce my best game, I can do some big damage.

**Let's go!  
Devon.**

**WHEN Rod Studd announced: "Daryl Gurney is the darling of Dublin", for the man from Derry good times had indeed never seemed so good.**

Gurney had claimed his maiden PDC major and in doing so made history becoming the first player from Northern Ireland to achieve it.

In a dramatic last set decider, Gurney defeated Simon Whitlock to become the 2017 World Grand Prix champion. It's a day every professional darts player dreams about, the day they can stand on a big stage and be crowned in front of a crowd of thousands and a television audience of millions.

Gurney began his darting career at just 18-years-old and after a decade plying his trade in the BDO he gained his PDC tour card at the 2013 Q-School. It was there he first met his now manager Matthew Ward.

Recalling the encounter Gurney says: "I met him the day after I won my card. He came up to Wigan in the snow and we had a good chat."

However it wasn't until a couple years later that he found his feet and began making large strides. Gurney went into the 2015 Players Championships as a rank outsider but unveiled a new nickname and walk-on song.

Superchin was born and the crowd welcomed him on stage to the tune of 'Sweet Caroline'. It seemed to work as he enjoyed a successful run in the event.

He added: "Matt chose both. I don't like the nickname to be honest but lots of people do. He also picked the song after 'Hey Baby' was rejected by the PDC because it was Tony O Shea's walk on. But I made the semis and beat Gary Anderson on the way, the rest is history."

Anderson was the current reigning World Champion so quite a scalp and when Gurney despatched him in the second round, it made plenty sit up and notice.

Only Michael van Gerwen prevented Superchin from flying into his first major PDC final but the signs were there that glory wasn't too far away.

Appearing on the hallowed Alexandra Palace stage for the first time in 2016 he impressively defeated Jermaine Wattimena. He then followed that up with wins over Robert Thornton and Mark Webster before Michael van Gerwen ended his progress in the quarter-final.

However it was 2017 which really made Gurney a household name and put him well and truly amongst the world's elite. It seemed like that maiden television title wasn't too far away as he enjoyed runs to both the semi finals of the UK Open and World Matchplay. Then on October 7 in the final of the World Grand Prix came the day Superchin had been waiting for.

Going into the event Gurney recalls: "I was playing the best darts of my life that year, so

# Good times NEVER seemed so GOOD

NOT A SWEET YEAR FOR GURNEY BUT UNDERDOG STILL HAS BITE

WORDS: PAUL WOODAGE PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

many Pro Tour finals but only one win. When I beat Thornton in the quarters I knew I had a good chance and winning it was one of the best feelings ever."

When he beat Whitlock to lift the trophy it elevated Gurney to the top four in the world and secured him a place in the 2018 Premier League.

Things changed dramatically for Superchin too as himself and partner Aine became parents for the very first time following the birth of their son, Daryl jnr. Being in the Premier League and Pro Tour weekend events directly after often means long spells away from home and it is extremely difficult as a new father.

He admits: "Yes having a baby changed a lot of things and when I'm away I do miss him but it made me more focused on winning and providing a future for him."

Despite a fifth place finish on debut in the Premier League, it was still another successful year for Gurney as he claimed his second television major in November lifting the Players Championship trophy in Minehead.

For the Derry man having the close

connection which he has with his manager and good friend Ward is extremely important. Like any relationship, it's not always sunshine and rainbows but at the end of the day he knows there is mutual trust, support and belief in abundance there.

He jokes: "We argue a lot and fall out every time we see each other! But he is my friend and I am godfather to his son (Jack) so we are very close although he thinks he's right all the time and I disagree."

"It's been beneficial to be a part of a good stable with players supporting one another. Being with Stuart Kellett and Dean Winstanley helped a lot and I roomed with Dean for three years."

A charity which is very close to Daryl's heart is cystic fibrosis. Sadly he lost his close friend Aaron McMenamin only a few years ago to the terrible disease and proudly wears a pendant depicting him as a constant reminder around his neck. During last year's Paddy Power Champions League of Darts, Gurney had his head shaved and the sponsors of the event generously donated a large sum towards the cause.

He said: "It felt really good as Aaron

**I know what I'm capable of, I think everyone knows that. I've beaten all the top players at some stage and in finals. It's just up to me to find the levels I need to achieve that.**

was my best friend and we raised over £20,000 in the end which was fantastic. Having his Mum and Dad over to watch also made it special."

It's been a difficult year for most people due to the current pandemic. Gurney though welcomed the long break: "I loved lockdown as I got to spend lots of time with my little boy and relished a break for the first time in six years. Playing behind closed doors isn't ideal but the PDC have done their very best in a tough situation."

"I like being under the radar. but at the same time you have to look at

the stats and form. The best players in the world right now in terms of form and finishing are probably Gezzy Price, Peter Wright, Gary Anderson and Michael van Gerwen.

"I don't want to be disrespectful and forget anyone else but that's probably the top four. So for me I am trying to get to their level and I love being the underdog."

"I know what I'm capable of, I think everyone knows that. I've beaten all the top players at some stage and in finals. It's just up to me to find the levels I need to achieve that."



Between 2017 and 2018, Daryl Gurney won a whopping £707,000 in PDC prize money.  
@DartsDatabase

## Polly JAMES



**LUSH. Just lush.**

I have to admit I'm still on a high from watching Gezzy (Price) and Jonny (Clayton) win the World Cup for Wales!

What a year for Wales in darts. Wayne Warren wins the BDO World Championship, Gezzy wins the Grand Prix, then the World Cup.

There's been quite a few moments in 2020 that I've been left screaming at the telly in sheer joy of a Welsh winner.

Now for the REALLY big one, the PDC Worlds.

It would be awesome to get a clean sweep of the major titles for Wales and I reckon it's not beyond reality.

Gezzy has been unplayable at times this year and for me he comes across as the hungriest player in the world and that sets him apart from the rest.

I think what really interested me was his passion at winning the World Cup. He admitted that it meant more to him than both the Grand Slam wins and Grand Prix. It's clear that passion runs through his veins.

Also watching him at the Slam recently, he was louder than ever. That was an epic match with Nathan Aspinall and it was always going to take a huge performance to end Gezzy's winning streak.

What did make me laugh was Nathan saying he didn't realise just how loud Gezzy was especially when there are no fans in the arena. He reckoned it was very intimidating. No wonder, he's a rugby boy!

I definitely won't underestimate Jonny's part in the World Cup. He comes across as the quiet guy but he's a real performer and by all accounts he's not really all that quiet.

Overall, darts has been incredible this year.

Even though missing fans in darts is probably a bigger factor than in any other sport. Yet the competition has been just as fierce.

Some of the players have obviously taken time to get used to no crowds. But even the likes of Gezzy and Nathan, who need that adrenalin rush more than anyone, seem to be back at the top of their game now.

The other fascinating aspect now is the unlikely players suddenly getting big results. That seems to be the new trend in 2020.

Every tournament seems to unearth a new guy. Dimitri Van den Bergh was obviously always a future champion, but he came of age at the World Matchplay. Then we had Dirk van Duijvenbode in the Grand Prix and even the likes of Jose De Sousa and Adam Hunt were brilliant in the Grand Slam.

It just means that these days anyone can seem to put a run together and upset the big guns.

And so it's now the World Championship, wall-to-wall darts from mid-December to the end of the year.

Bring. It. On!

**You can hear Polly James on Radio X, FM, online, digital radio and on the Radio X app.**

**Polly is also a social media host for Unibet Premier League.**



# Keane *dream*

WORDS: PAUL WOODAGE PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

## BARRY VOWS TO LEARN WORLDS LESSON

**M**OST five-year-olds can barely throw a dart straight but at that age Keane Barry was hitting 180s. The huge potential was already evident from that tender age.

Keane's father was a keen darts player and his son would often get his son involved when practising at home.

Now 18, Barry admits: "My dad had a board in the house and when I was about four I started playing with him. When he was finished I would grab the darts and go back on the oche.

"Dad was a good player, it was just a hobby for him and he would throw down the pub. Probably good enough to compete on the challenge tour back then but when he broke his ankle he never got back into it.

"I loved watching Phil Taylor. Growing up it was him and Adrian Lewis who were my favourites. I enjoyed watching Adie progress."

It was no surprise to see Keane making waves on the circuit and in 2017 he reached the final of the World Boys Masters. The likes of Stephen Bunting and Jeffrey de Zwann had all lifted the trophy but the boy from County Meath was beaten by German Nico Blum.

He fell at the final hurdle the following year too, this time defeated by young Dutchman, Jurjen van der Velde but in 2019 Keane made history as the only player to appear in three consecutive

finals. It was third time lucky as he defeated Charlie Manby to finally claim the title.

Reflecting with pride, Barry says: "I knew I was playing well all day. When I got to the final I was determined not to lose this time."

By now many were touting this young wonder kid from the Emerald Isle as a future World Champion.

In December 2019, Keane made his debut on the hallowed Alexandra Palace stage as he faced the experienced Vincent van der Voort. Unfortunately the occasion got the better of the young Irishman and he lost 3-0.

Looking back on the experience he said: "The draw wasn't too bad. Vince wasn't on form and I knew if I could beat him I would have Chizzy next but I wasn't prepared that day.

"I was late getting to the venue as I didn't account for how much time it would take to do interviews and photos. When the match began I didn't feel 100 per cent ready then the crowd started booing Vince to get behind me and no player likes to hear that."

However disappointment was shortlived as he returned to the same stage a few days later to claim the JDC Youth Championship defeating Czech, Adam Gawless 5-3 in the final.

He added: "The match against Vincent really helped me. I knew what to expect from the crowd and just went up and

played my darts. There were less nerves because I had been there recently and could see Adam wasn't settling in as quickly. In the end I was delighted to get the win."

The day was made even more special as it was the one year anniversary for himself and girlfriend Barbora. She was over from her native Czech Republic for Christmas to see Barry lift the title. They had met in Hungary in 2016 at a darts event and romance blossomed for the pair.

There was disappointment in Q-School at the start of 2020 where Barry missed out on a PDC tour card when former BDO World Champion, Scott Waites beat him 5-0.

However, from success breeds success and a month later Keane was at it again winning titles, this time in the Lakeside World Youth Championship against the reigning champion Leighton Bennett.

Barry said: "I recall Leighton wasn't playing that many events coming up to the tournament and had pulled out of a few. I settled really well and took the first set. When he missed darts to level things up I took advantage and at 2-0 felt very confident in winning the match."

And win it he did 3-0 with an impressive 93 average. Heads that weren't turning before were certainly spinning now. The boy nicknamed Dynamite had exploded onto the development tour and eventually claimed his two year PDC tour card by finishing runner up on the order of merit.



There are some exciting young players coming through the ranks now and very capable of doing damage against the big boys.

Keane says: "Bradley Brooks is seriously talented. Every time I'm up against him we have an amazing game and bring the best out of one another. He has so much talent and will do very well.

"Ted Evetts is another one to watch. He is now playing much more consistently and has a good management stable with a lot of experienced players who will help him."

Barry hasn't been short of offers on the table but prefers to look after his own affairs for now.

He added: "My girlfriend Barbora and my parents take care of that side of things for me. At the moment it works just fine for us and Gary Plummer at Target has kindly offered any advice and guidance if I need it. If the pressure gets too much and it's financially viable in the future then perhaps I would consider looking for full time management."

Next up for Barry is a return to the World Championship where

he says he will be ready this time.

He said: "I now know what it is all about and my preparation will be much better. I always have butterflies before any big game but I know the occasion now and it won't be quite as overwhelming as last year.

"My consistency is much better than it was a couple of years ago. I am confident if I play my best game I have a chance against anyone.

"The way things are right now numbers are limited to who can travel to events with you.

"I rarely go on away on my own but may have to. I always pack my laptop to watch TV and movies and may start taking up Playstation too. It is important to have plenty of things to keep me occupied.

"It will be tough. But I am not in it just to make up the numbers and after two years I hope to be in the top 64, qualify for as many television events as I can and push on from there.

"I believe in my own game and am able to put it up to the best. I need to put the effort in and take the chances when they come."



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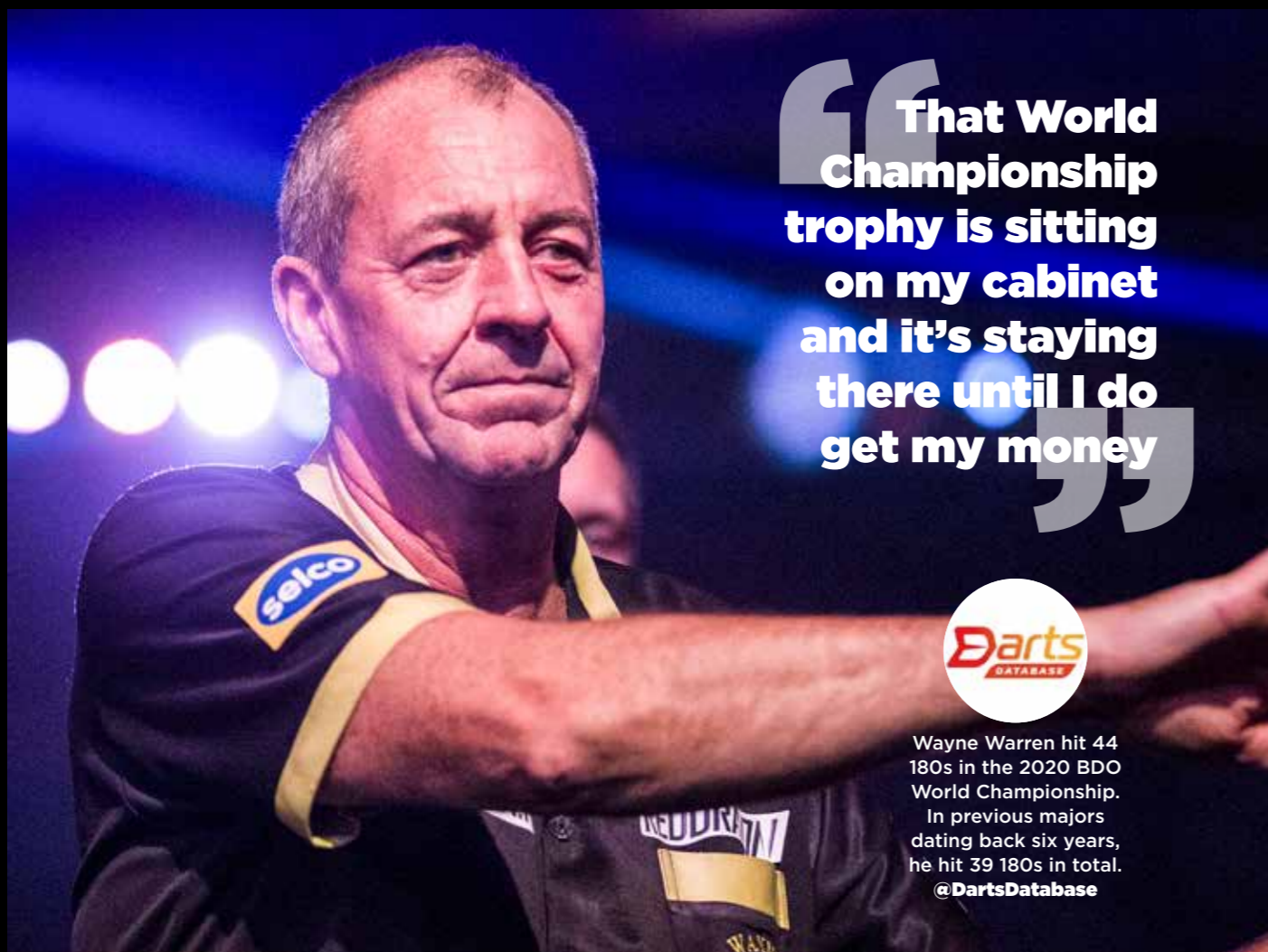
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# Wayne keeps Worlds

## CHAMP HANGS ON TO TROPHY



**“That World Championship trophy is sitting on my cabinet and it’s staying there until I do get my money”**



Wayne Warren hit 44 180s in the 2020 BDO World Championship. In previous majors dating back six years, he hit 39 180s in total.  
@DartsDatabase

WORDS: PHIL LANNING PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

**WAYNE WARREN has admitted he may be the “unluckiest” World Champion ever but is keeping the famous trophy.**

The Rhondda roofer became world champion at the O2 Indigo in January but was only paid £23,000, £77,000 down from the previous year.

It has been revealed there will be no BDO World Darts Championship in the New Year. Organisers threatened BDO World Masters winner John O’Shea with legal action for failing to return his trophy. But Warren said: “John was actually threatened by Des Jacklin about his trophy. He said he was going to take him to court, come on.

“That World Championship trophy is sitting on my cabinet and it’s staying there until I do get my money. I’m a creditor of £77,000, it’s not going anywhere.

“Up until lockdown I promoted it everywhere, I took it to Romania, Czech Republic, to all my local schools. I’ll be more than happy to give it back if they give me the money.

“The exhibitions I had for 2020 have been put back until next year. But I’m hoping to take that trophy around in 2021.

“On a personal note I feel a bit gutted that the BDO has gone. I’ve always played my darts and brought up in the BDO.

“To be honest you could see it was going downhill fast, the way Des put it in. He put the final nail in the coffin.

“You can’t keep up with the PDC and Des put it down as far as I’m concerned. He wasn’t the right man for the job. Don’t get me wrong, he did do one thing which was the venue, the O2. But he should have had all the players’ prize money.

“At least at Lakeside all the prize money was there. Before he’d taken anything from anywhere, that should have been in place and it wasn’t. Then what happened in the World Masters was enough.

“He did nothing but lie from the word go. He was saying all the ticket sales were great. We knew very well the ticket sales weren’t good. He just wouldn’t have help, he thought he could do it on his own,

and he couldn’t.”

After a tough Grand Slam having not played since March, Warren admits that he is devastated not being able to defend his world title.

He added: “I’m a proud winner but to not defend it I’m gutted. The BDO is gone. You’ve got the UKDA but the BDO was iconic. I do feel a bit down that I can’t go back to defend it.

“But I’ll go to Q School now and see what happens. If I don’t get the PDC Tour Card I’ve got the WDF to fall back on. There’s plenty of things ahead.

“I might be the unluckiest World Champion in history. If I’d tested positive for Covid before the Grand Slam, that would have been just my luck in 2020!

“Looking back on this year I can smile about it now. I’ve been bitter and gutted about the money I lost out on. But you can’t take the World Championship away from me. I can smile about it now, I’m over it.

“I’ve renovated all my house with the £23,000 I won. It’s in good hands, my partner got it, don’t worry!

“To be fair £100,000 would have been a lot of money, especially at my age now. I would have taken a year off work to concentrate on my

darts. I’ve got a little boy who is only six and I’ve got to think of him as well.

“But in the end Covid has also changed everyone’s lives and I’ve been very busy with my roof business. I wouldn’t work indoors in other people’s houses because of Covid but you can socially distance on rooves!

“To be called out as World Champion at the Grand Slam was great. But I hadn’t played a tournament since March so it was tough.”

Warren almost admits that he’s hugely proud of the strength of Wales and feels they could be the strongest country in the world right now.

He added: “Wales are definitely sitting pretty. It’s great with me being World Champion and then Jonny and Gezzy winning the World Cup.

“I wouldn’t bet against Gezzy winning the PDC World Championship and that could give Wales a clean sweep of world titles.

“Young Nick Kenny got a nine-darter at the Winter Series last week and Jonny is also playing fantastic. Wales are stronger than we’ve ever been I reckon. It’s fantastic I’m so happy for all the boys.”



## MVG ADMITS TO CALLING RIVAL WORSLEY “A RAT”

**MICHAEL van Gerwen has released a statement and admitted to calling Jonathan Worsley “a rat” after an altercation at the Winter Series.**

Worsley was set to play Daryl Gurney in the first round but revealed earlier he pushed the World No.1 after an incident regarding marking after games, which is now being investigated by the Darts Regulation Authority.

The Welshman was told off for marking in a shirt that doesn’t follow the PDC dress code but then spoke to the tournament director about who was marking for Van Gerwen in jeans and a t-shirt.

Van Gerwen addressed this in his statement and did admit that like Worsley’s post said he did call him a rat and that Worsley did try pushing him.

He said: “After seeing many things placed and said on social media over the last few hours. I have a short statement to make.”

“This morning at the PDC Winter Series, Jonathan and myself did have crossed words over the marking of games at the Winter Series. The reason the PDC Tournament Director had words with him, as he wanted to mark in a rugby shirt, not just a regular shirt.

“I admit to calling him a rat in the exchange of words. We are all colleagues, he could have come and had a quiet word with me if he felt there was a problem.

“When we were outside, I was still unhappy that he had not come to me first, and our discussion continued. Yes again, I did call him a rat. At this point, Jonathan tried to lay his hands on me, that was seen by colleagues. The way they dealt with it was very professional.

“The PDC spoke with everyone who was there, and we all know once that has happened. There is only one outcome. You will be removed from the tournament. It is as simple as that. We all know that you can not place your hands on another player as he did.

“We all know this. He way everything was dealt with today was very professional. As far as I am concerned, the matter has now been dealt with by the PDC and we move on. All my focus is now on the Grand Slam, and I will not be answering any further questions on the matter.”

World No.97 Worsley wrote on Facebook that he was told off for wearing a shirt that doesn’t follow the PDC dress code after he spilt a drink down his shirt earlier in the week.

He added that he then asked the tournament director about the rule

when he spotted someone marking for MVG in jeans and a t-shirt.

Van Gerwen found out about this and approached Worsley and according to the Welshman, the World No.1 tried to “intimidate” him and called him “a rat”. Worsley then reacted and pushed him. He was then removed from the tournament.

Worsley released this statement (exact wording from his Facebook): “This is what happened...

On Wednesday I had to go to the toilet after my game.

At the same time I spilt a drink down my top,

So I changed my shirt asap and rushed back to mark the board!

On Thursday I got a b\*\*\*\*\*ing off the tournament director for wearing a shirt we aren’t allowed to wear, so I apologised and that was that.

Then mvg had to mark and he got someone to mark for him in Jean’s and a t-shirt!

So I asked Keith the tournament director what the difference was you cant have 1 rule for him and another for me. I made no formal complaint so this should of been kept between me and the tournament director.

However today mvg comes to the table and starts giving me s\*\*\* asking why i reported him then starts calling me names and trying to intimidate me...

Rat, Rat, Rat, Rat etc

I said no Mike it wasn’t aimed at you I just said it should be equal for all players...fair point to make!

Anyway I went out for a fag just stood there with scott chatting And he starts trying to intimidate me calling me Rat, Rat, Rat etc

I explained it one last time and people listening agreed

He kept going so I pushed him

He reported me to the pdc bearing in mind the security knew full well he had been provoking me yet I get kicked out hes alright to play!

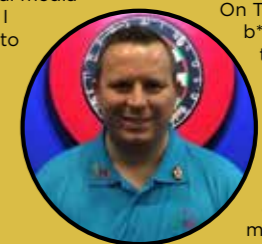
How is that right?

“The pdc didn’t even speak to the security” to see both sides just took mvg side.

Absolute joke.

So ive lost out today because you cant talk to officials confidentially without them gossiping and stirring!

Ps. The security and some of the officials where quality.”



# PANDEMONIUM

Top coach Feeney on Covid factor and Price rise to glory



EXCLUSIVE WORDS: PHIL LANNING PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

**C**OACH Stephen Feeney has worked with sporting legends.

Ryder Cup heroes Darren Clarke, Colin Montgomerie and Paul McGinley plus snooker and darts legends Stephen Hendry, Steve Davis, Terry Griffiths, Jimmy White and Phil Taylor.

Using his unique patented SightRight sighting and alignment tests and routines and the expertise developed over 15 years, Stephen has helped players of all abilities improve their accuracy in these sports, with amazing results.

For our focus on sports coaching, Darts World Editor Phil Lanning spoke to Feeney (pictured above right) on the impact Covid-19 has had on sport...

**PL: How has the pandemic and change of event schedules truly affected players. Is it just an excuse for poor performance or does it have a genuine impact?**

SF: There's a huge impact on sportsmen and women due to the pandemic.

Those who practice in the wrong way are going to suffer to a greater extent than others. We are talking about different types of psyche here. Some players will get into a zone in a completely different

way to others.

So if they can't prepare the way they want to for each event, then at the event they feel as if they are rough.



Imagine you're a chief executive going into a board meeting and instead of having three days to prepare for a presentation, you've only got an hour. Suddenly you just don't feel prepared. And when a person doesn't feel fully prepared, then anxiety and fears creep in.

Whereas others can play on the hoof. Some people are not good practisers, if they can adapt then these circumstances can suit them. It's a very individual thing.

It can affect people differently.

When you look at some players in repetitive sport and the way they practice, it's almost an obsessive disorder.

If some people can't do certain things before they go out to certain tournaments, they become anxious if they can't perform their own little rituals.

A ritual in preparation is 'I must do these things before I go and play'. Now they've got back-to-back tournaments.

If they don't perform in the first, then they haven't got time to prepare for the second.

So some people who are very diligent,

very careful, very meticulous, very focused in their preparation can almost feel unravelled.

Players are having to prepare for not one tournament but for a run of tournaments and that can be very difficult for some to adapt to.

That changes so much. If that person doesn't play well in the first event, have they got time to deal with that and prepare in time for the next.

The Premier League successive nights and Summer, Autumn and Winter Series events had a huge affect on players.

There's a case here that the more meticulous players could be affected more than the more natural players, the ones who don't feel they need to work at what they're doing.

The pandemic has caused huge problems for different people.

The bottom line is that no matter who you are, World No.1 or No.128, you have to take time to figure out how you need to deal with it. Every professional player is a businessman or woman. If you business structure changes, you have to cope with that.

For some it might be the preparation rituals that affect them the most, for some it will be stuck in a hotel room in a bubble, anxious to whether you are playing having undertaken a Covid test.

Nothing of these elements can be underestimated. That's an anxiety, it will

change your mindset, change your focus on the actual game because the thought process leading up to it is on whether you are playing or not rather than the game.

Every top sportsman or woman whether in darts, snooker, golf will have a routine of a way they get into a zone.

It's almost like upsetting a superstition, it will play havoc with the psychological approach and then in performance.

**PL: A lack of crowds is clearly affecting some players but in what way?**

SF: How long would a comedian keep telling jokes with no one listening to them, when there's no laughter?

All of these players in darts are entertainers. The very nature of darts and snooker, the players have been built up to put on a show for the fans. Sport is seen and promoted as entertainment.

The only fans these players have got at the minute is the TV camera.

All the false cheering is probably more off-putting than maybe not having cheering at all.

Some players have struggled just to be in front of the TV cameras. I've been aware of players who are almost sick before walking out at The Crucible.

When you are walking out in front of a crowd, there's an impact on you. You can either embrace that or it injects a fear factor.

Take that audience away and the only thing that can impact a player now is the silence and the camera.

What about if you like the audience but don't like the TV camera? Some players play to the camera like Michael van Gerwen and Gerwyn Price, they love the camera, they give it some.

To a degree that's great, but they also feed off the audience.

Conversely, without the crowd and without the sheer nerves, they can also affect focus which also some players work off. That adrenaline can be vital and without that the players can feel very flat. Without the nerves, you are not alive.

I've got snooker players that feel very flat, one of them doesn't even want to be there because they are playing in a bubble.

Imagine a top dart player not wanting to be at events? That will be the case with some.

That adrenaline has gone for the moment. So they've either got to recreate it in their heads so they get the type of focus that they need.

**PL: Gerwyn Price is one of the clear favourites for the World Championship. Does his aggressive rugby background and the siege mentality after the Grand Slam controversy truly help him?**

SF: I maybe wrong here, but I don't think he's planned that. He's switched across from a very aggressive sport. I don't care what anyone says, if you are going to run into huge 20 stone rugby opponents, you've got to have bottle.

I think he's always coming across to darts thinking he is a strong character. There's a huge fight in him.

In rugby you are playing for inches and yards, hard sport. There's no point having a weak or feint heart. His ability to bring that is unique, you could argue who else has had that in darts? He's brought a different edge to top line darts.

He has no fear, he will face issues head on, and he won't accept the word no.

He has created his own image, his own brand.

Whether or not he's done that intentionally or whether it's just happened naturally, I don't know.

I remember this analogy. Why does Stephen Hendry walk around the snooker table with an aura? Well he never intended it, it's just the way he walked around the table. He created the aura.

In his own way, Gezzy has done the same thing.

I think that Gerwyn deep down has got the heart of a dragon. He's turned up into the darts world and said 'I'm not going to be bullied. I've stood my ground in front of beefy guys on a rugby pitch, if you think you are going to bully me physically or mentally on stage, that just isn't going to happen.'

So he's already got a huge competitive strong mind and competitive streak in him.

He's got transferable skills from rugby to darts. Everybody knows he is not going to be bullied on that stage.

Whatever people like to accuse him of, he's got a huge personality.

He is also deeply patriotic. It meant so much to him and Jonny Clayton to win the World Cup, you could see that. Gerwyn said that meant more to him than anything else.

He's a guy that is able to channel his focus. And that's a huge asset.

**\*For more information go to [www.sightrightuk.com](http://www.sightrightuk.com)**

## A STAR IS THORN

JETHRO BREMNER-ALLISON REFLECTS ON A LEGENDARY FINAL...



**IT'S hard to believe that Robert Thornton is battling to save his PDC Tour Card at the end of this year.**

On his day, The Thorn has the ability to beat anyone in the world and he's proved that with major wins over Phil Taylor and Michael van Gerwen. Matches north of the border, we remember with great fondness.

Cast your mind back to 2012. Back in the days before every tournament had a bookmaker sponsor, it was the FA Cup of Darts, the Speedy Services UK Open.

An incredible 177 players arrived at the Reebok Stadium with Taylor favourite as always.

Fast forward to the end of the week and Taylor had taken his expected berth in the final, cruising his way through the rounds. Standouts of these were Colin Osbourne disposed mercilessly 9-1 in Round 4 and poor Dennis Ovens raced out of the door in the semi finals 10-2.

In the opposite corner was self-effacing Scotsman, Robert Thornton. Only six months after a dreadful dose of pneumonia, he hadn't been on anyone's potential list heading into the tournament. On top of this, his run to the final had been treacherous to say the least. He joined the competition in Round 3 sneaking through 9-7 vs former World Champion Mark Webster before wins over Gary Anderson (9-7), Dennis Priestley (9-5), Wes Newton (10-8) and in the semi-finals Dave Chisnall (10-4).

Rewatching the final now, you're immediately taken back to how unlikely a Thornton win will be. Pundits stroking their chins are searching for any little crumb of hope. How he can even take a few legs off the already 15 times champion of the world?

Thornton appears at the end of the runway looking tense. Hunched shoulders and that familiar good luck bear crammed into his top pocket. The crowd react as always to the Proclaimers and he silently mutters "come on" several times as he moves gingerly onto the stage. Phil on the other hand strolls out like a rockstar. Sporting a union jack shirt and a grin, he looks every inch the champion in waiting.

They throw for bull on stage. Phil hits bull, Robert trembles a 25. Phil throws an 11 dart leg to lead. We won't be here long we collectively assume, Phil fancies it and the confidence is practically oozing out of the Power's pores. Power breaks in leg two in 12 darts, and the talk is of whether he can reach a 120 average, not whether this will be a match.

But the Ayrshire water must have some granite in it as Robert now has a nice familiar feeling on the stage, confidence gained from his run to the final. Thornton sneaks the 3rd leg and shares the next two to trail 3-2 at the first break.

The following stanza, Robert's eye was in. Despite being put off in leg seven when an enthusiastic punter dived onto the stage, swiftly ejected by the stewards, he didn't let it touch his concentration. Heavily scoring he seemed to revel in the heat of the battle frequently saluting the crowd to the right of the oche rather than the family section as he always seemed to prefer. The 3-2 reverse springs into a 7-3 lead and the crowd is hushed, the commentators stunned. "The Power just doesn't lose finals," Rod Studd utters.

But the procession continues, up to 9-3, finally Thornton is favourite for this major. Taylor battles but he can't touch the irrepressible Scot who knows today is his time.

In the biggest leg of his darting life the Thorn goes 140, 100, 140, 121 to tidy up the match in brutal style. 11-5. He hugs Taylor as he realises he's achieved one of his dreams.

Across Scotland fans jumped up off their sofas as that dream became reality. A great day for Scottish darts amongst many in the past decade and as Robert stuffed the cheque for £40,000 in his teddy bear pocket.

# MAD hat-trick

WORDS: STEFAN EVRARD PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

## Legendary trio join amateur revolution

MODERN AMATEUR DARTS LATEST NEWS



THREE WE GO:  
John Gwynne  
(above), Paul  
Nicholson (right)  
and Laura  
Turner (below)  
all join MAD



**D**ESPITE the pandemic continuing to cause the local darts scene to remain static, the last couple of months have been very busy behind the scenes in the MAD world.

The positive behind the current climate is that it allows us at MAD to get the national infrastructure into place, as well as designing all our products and processes to really enable us to hit the ground running when we eventually emerge through the other side.

So where exactly are MAD with our appointments?

We recently announced that Paul Nicholson will be a non-Executive Director on the MAD Board. Paul's passion for the amateur game and belief in the MAD concept will really help us drive the brand forward and spread the word amongst the masses.

Another notable appointment is legendary Sky Sports commentator John Gwynne, who will be a MAD ambassador in the England Falcons Super Region (Lancashire/Cheshire), a real hotbed for local dart players.

Most recently announced was the appointment of Ladies World Championship competitor and Sky Sports Commentator Laura Turner, who has become the Super Regional Director for the England Titans Super Region, covering London, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, and Essex.

Laura has done it all in the game, from youth, county and senior. She's also been a huge influence in local events both running and playing, the BDO Tour, and dabbling in the PDC. Her connections and influence will leave the England Titans in great hands.

We have now formally appointed 14 of our required 16 Super Regional Directors, with the other two currently going through the application process.

Each Super Regional Director is recruiting 16 Regional Directors themselves.

These currently are...

**ENGLAND INVADERS - Stefan Evrard**

**ENGLAND WARRIORS - Robbie Long**

**ENGLAND KNIGHTS - Brian Ivey**

**ENGLAND TITANS - Laura Turner**

**ENGLAND EAGLES - Jamie Elliot**

**ENGLAND ROYALS - Anthony Maycroft**

**ENGLAND APACHES - Darren McCloskey**

**ENGLAND FALCONS - Alan Hodgson**

**ENGLAND TERRIERS - Simon Harris**

**ENGLAND OSPREYS - Carl South/Dave Ladley**

**ENGLAND NOMADS - Scott Hunt**

**WALES SHARKS - Bedwyr Davies**

**WALES PATRIOTS - Phil Smith**

**SCOTLAND BRAVEHEARTS - Alan Kerr**

**A**SIDE from recruiting our key people, the MAD father Steve Brown has been flicking through his black book and joining forces with many a powerhouse in both the darts industry and the surge in online media.

Recently announced media partnerships include Darts World, the ever popular Youtube Channels Edgar TV, The Darts Referee, Live Darts, Darts Planet TV and Online Darts. At the same time, we have also announced manufacturing partnerships with Winmau, Red Dragon, Target, Performance Darts, and Trinidad Original.

The support from all these partners will provide good foundations for the MAD Brand across all aspects and interests of amateur darts, and will allow us to really promote the brand and of course amateur darts itself.

The most popular partnership announced a couple of months ago was with the United Kingdom Darts Association (UKDA), the newly formed governing body for the County Darts Scene after the sad demise of the BDO and the associated BICC Operation.

This partnership will see all County Super Leagues in England and Wales affiliated to the MAD Ranking System, which provides a fantastic starting point for MAD to gain an initial membership and really develop the main output components off the MAD Concept, these being the League Side and the Events Side. A point to note is that MAD is open to all players, avoiding a common misconception that you have to be a Super League Member to become a MAD member. Anyone can be involved.

The League side of the MAD concept sees players drawn from the local affiliated leagues to represent their Local Region. The 16 Regions within each Super Region compete in Quarterly Super Regional Events three times per year, from which 16 Super Regional Teams are formed to compete in the Annual National Championships

The Quarterly Events will see the 16 Regional Teams seeded based on the total number of MAD Points gained by each of its team members. Eight Teams will play on a Saturday, and the other eight on the Sunday. The weekends results will determine the Champions in Each Super Region.

The Ranking System for these events provide an exciting avenue for all players, as shortly before an event, the Rankings are reset to create a fresh level playing field for all players chasing the dream of representing their Region next time around.

The Events side will incorporate all Local Open Events wishing to be affiliated to the MAD Brand and carry MAD Points. Over the course of the year, the best performers in each region will be invited to MAD Major Events. Alongside these, MAD will be running Open Events for its members

There is still a fair way to go before MAD is fully structured, but it will be worth the wait.

\*Follow the MADdarts Facebook page and Twitter Feeds for regular updates.

## A DECADE FOR JDC...

**T**EN years in the making.

This month will mark the 10th anniversary of what we know today as the Junior Darts Corporation.

In 2010 professional darts player Steve Brown was looking for ways his son could participate in the sport he loved at a junior level.

Soon to realise that there was nothing structured for young players in his area Steve decided to see if anyone was interested in children playing in a group/academy session.

Above his dad's public house in Bristol, Steve advertised a session for youngsters to learn and play darts in his local area. Expecting half a dozen or so children that day, over 30 attended the first session and it was clear there was a need for this kind of opportunity for youngsters to play darts.

What made the sessions different was that Steve had created something the children could all do and would be the benchmark of their ability.

Known as the JDC routines, children throw at 57 independent targets in three segments. Shanghai 10-15, doubles around the board and Shanghai 15-20.

With an introduction of a coloured shirt system similar to coloured belts in martial arts, it was soon clear that the system worked and ability was clearly measured. Steve built three academies in the Bristol area and believed the model that we see today could spread around the UK, to give as many children an opportunity to play the game.

In 2011 The Steve Brown Darts academies would start to grow outside of the Bristol area. In the early years academies in Cannock, Worcester, Bedworth and Ludlow would start to open their doors.

Further to the academy growth over the next two to three years, the Steve Brown Darts Academies started to hold tournaments and competitions within the SBDA which showcased the talent within the academy structure. Big numbers started to attend these events and was the pre-cursor for what became the JDC Tour.

By 2012 Steve Brown had teamed up with his now Director of Operations Darren Barson who was the coach at the Worcester Darts academy at the time, and between them would go on to double the academy growth in the next two years.

With the inclusion of fellow professional Jamie Caven opening an academy in Derby and further academies opening up in the midlands and southwest, the SBDA was really gathering pace alongside a flourishing professional game within the PDC.

Numbers of children were increasing, numbers of competitors were increasing at events and the number of academies was increasing fast. In 2015 Steve and the team made the decision that the SBDA would need to evolve and become a market leader nationally and internationally.

This led to the birth of the Junior Darts Corporation.

The JDC would now in its portfolio have a dozen academies in the UK and then came a huge milestone for the JDC. The first academy to open outside the UK would be in Ireland. This was the catalyst to make the JDC a true international operation and



today we see academies and international partnerships around the globe for the JDC. In 2020 the JDC operates in many nations including New Zealand, Germany, Ireland, China, England and Wales. In total academies now number 35 across the world.

The JDC Tour has become truly International and in 2019 the JDC held its World Championships abroad for the first time in Gibraltar.

The JDC is now a firm fixture in the darts world and the game would seem odd without it. With huge media presence and a striking and exciting brand, coupled with support from market leaders in the game, the JDC has changed the way we think about darts at a junior level.

Brown admits: It's been a fantastic journey over the last 10 years. I can't thank the volunteers, our partners and sponsors enough for helping the JDC get to where it is today. We have so much more in the pipeline for the JDC. Here's to another 10 years."





Deta Hedman has won racked up 215 titles on the oche, second only to the great Phil Taylor and made a record-breaking 341 finals. @DartsDatabase

**“My life wasn’t extremely good. You just do what you have to do to survive”**

EXCLUSIVE WORDS: PHIL LANNING

## HEDMAN’S STORY FROM CARIBBEAN TO OCHE QUEEN

**A** 61-year journey from a house in Castleton, Jamaica to the Alexandra Palace, London.

Deta Hedman’s story is one from hardship to hero.

This remarkable woman makes the Cinderella fairytale look like she bought a dress from Primark and went to

McDonalds for a Happy Meal.

And there’s no glass slipper, just another glass ceiling being smashed above the oche.

This, of all years, sees Hedman become

the first black woman to play in the PDC World Championship.

It seems so appropriate after a ground-breaking year of awareness for Black Lives Matter. The horrific death of George Floyd in America, the protests, sportsmen and women taking the knee and Lewis Hamilton becoming the greatest Formula One driver of all-time.

Now it’s Hedman’s turn to make history.

Yet it began as a member of the Windrush generation, so appallingly treated by the UK Government over the past few months.

When Hedman was two years old, her father left Jamaica and her mother followed shortly after. She did not see them again until she was 13.

Like many other members of the Windrush generation, Hedman’s parents travelled to England in search of work and a better life for their children.

Hedman was left in a house made of wood with a zinc roof and a veranda. In the evenings, a paraffin lamp and candles were the only source of light.

With no running water or electricity in Castleton, Hedman would walk a mile with a bucket, back and forth until she had enough water for the whole family to drink.

Yet this incredible, humble woman doesn’t like to dwell on her difficult past. She told me: “I am definitely a fighter because of my upbringing. As a kid you don’t think of those things at all. My life wasn’t extremely good but it wasn’t bad either. You just do what you have to do to survive.

“That’s really what I do probably now. You try to survive and not take life too seriously. My attitude to life has shaped the person I am.

“I remember how hard it was as a kid. Of course I do. But there’s still people worse off than me. You don’t dwell on things like that, I think I’m extremely lucky because my parents decided to come away from Jamaica to make a better life for us.

“I wouldn’t be here if not for that so I am luckier than most. There’s still a lot of countries where it’s even harder than where I was in Jamaica.

“It was just how life was at the time. My family saw an opportunity and they were fortunate to be able to get here.

“It’s hard to hear about the issues around the Windrush generation. Especially because we were invited at the time. I’m fortunate because after I was old enough I got a British passport.

“My dad is no longer with us, he passed away 15 years ago and my mum is in her 80s.

“My mum is like me, she doesn’t worry about anything. She is very proud of me now. She worked for the NHS for a long, long time.

“She has been diabetic for 40 years so it takes its toll and she is shielding right now because of Covid-19.”

There’s certainly some fight and sporting gene in the Hedman family. Hedman’s brother Rudi was a professional footballer playing for Colchester United and Crystal Palace. Her other brother, Al, was a professional darts player and former 1995

**“I just get up there as the oldest woman and do what I can. I’m enjoying being 60-odd and the youngsters still can’t beat me!”**



be honest. If we think we are good at something, we will pursue it. I think it’s just bred in us, I don’t know.”

Hedman admits that her Worlds qualification and appearance will be a highlight of a fascinating journey from rags to riches.

This remarkable woman has racked up 215 titles on the oche, second only to the great Phil Taylor and made a record-breaking 341 finals.

She added: “I don’t think about the journey I’ve had to be honest. I let everyone else talk about the statistics. My other half tells me about it and I just say ‘ahh OK!’ I just don’t get myself bogged down with anything.

“The moment that the PDC said they would have two ladies in the World Championship about 10 years ago, Stacy and Trisha got through, I did think I had a chance then. Then when Lisa and Anna were in it, I also felt I had a chance.

“But I turned 60 and the way Lisa and Fallon have been playing, I just felt I’d go to the Women’s Series and see if I could pick up some shekles. Not in a million years did I think I’d qualify.

“It’s been an amazing 2020. So much has happened. Lewis Hamilton has become the greatest Formula One driver and all sorts. It’s strange that I’ve qualified for the World Championship in times like this.

“I’ve haven’t done that in years before when I believed I was at the top of my game.

“Lisa has been there before and has got a tour card. I just get up there as the oldest woman and do what I can. I’m enjoying being 60-odd and the youngsters still can’t beat me!

“I will just keep going. I’m also an ambassador for the youth so when I cannot physically play myself I’ll still be there in trying to bring new talent through.

“I also play for England, which I’m very proud of. The England ladies have held all the titles over the past few years.

“But I’ve still got the highlight of my career to come, playing in the PDC World Championship. That’s because I never thought ladies would have the opportunity to do that.

“Whether I play good or bad, nobody can take that away from me. I’ve done it.

“I think it’s a tall order to go and match Hamilton’s seven world titles now though!”

A remarkable woman. And so deservedly, this darting Cinderella will go to the bullseye.

BDO British Open Champion and nephew Graham is a 400-metre runner.

Yet her mum won’t be able to watch her daughter’s ground-breaking Worlds appearance, because she doesn’t have Sky!

Herman added: “I don’t think my mum will watch me in the World Championship because she hasn’t got Sky!

“The rest of the family will be watching and they will tell her all about it anyway.

“They are behind me 100 per cent shouting me on as they always do and their neighbours will get annoyed and ask them to keep the noise down.

“I don’t know where the sporting gene comes from. I think it’s just get up and go to



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**A**s the year quickly draws to an end we will be seeing out the old and ringing in the new but in the world of darts this has already happened as the old British Darts Organisation has been replaced by the new, exciting and adventurous United Kingdom Darts Association.

In its inaugural season the UKDA has attracted no fewer than 53 teams. Paul Marsh, the Chief Operations Manager will be overlooking the five various regions, each with a regional operations manager.

The regions are made up of for the North (with Claire Stamper Operations Manager), Cheshire, Cleveland, County Durham, Cumbria, Humberside, Lancashire, Merseyside, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Wirral and Yorkshire.

Andy Walsh is the Operations Manager for the Central region of Black Country, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Midlands.

Wales/Central Operations Manager Stephen Greenwood will have under his control Breconshire, Clwyd, Glamorgan, Gwent, Gwynedd, Montgomery and Radnor, Pembrokeshire, Salopian, Shropshire and Worcestershire while Richard Biggs South East teams are Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, London, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Suffolk and Surrey.

Karen Brown will be the South West Operations Manager looking after Berkshire, Cornwall Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Somerset, Sussex, West of England and Wiltshire.

Making up the 15-strong management team will be Oliver Croft jnr (President), Morgan Barrell (Founder and Head of Marketing and Social Media), Colin Savage (Chief Executive Officer (CEO)), Johnny Stefano (Chairman), Claire Stamper (Commercial Director and North Region Operations Manager), Davie Hanson (Events Director), Tony Martin (Players Director), Cat Handley (Finance Director), Mike Kenny (Finance Manager), Rebecca Hoyland (General Secretary), Laura Turner (Assistant Secretary), Darren Manning (Sponsorship and Fundraising Executive), Stephen Greenwood (Chief Disciplinary Officer plus Wales and East Central Region Operations Manager), Debbie Jones (Youth Development Officer), Paul Marsh (Chief Operations Manager), Andy Walsh (Central Region Operations Manager), Richard Biggs (South East Region Operations Manager), Karen Brown (South West Region Operations Manager), Micky Reed (National League Divisional Administrator), Dave Vanderson (National League Divisional Administrator), David Ballantine (IT Support).

Provisional fixture dates have been set for the envisaged 2021-2022 season and they are on the weekends of the 18th/19th September, 2nd/3rd October, 6th/7th November, 27th/28th November, 11th/12th December, 8th/9th January, 5th/6th February, 26th/27th February and the 26th/27th March.

In addition to the National League fixtures the UKDA will be staging a Magic Weekend on the 23rd/24th April followed by a UKDA National Finals on the 25th/26th June.

Since the formation of the UKDA a partnership has been formed with the British Disability Darts Association with both parties responding to the news as follows;

The partnership will allow the UKDA to work closer with the BDDA to bring disability dart players further opportunities in the grassroots game.

Ahead of the announcement, UKDA Chairman Johnny Stefano said: "After numerous conversations with Shane (Havard), I feel that a partnership with the BDDA, will be beneficial to both parties, and will generate avenues for para darters in the UK, to



COLIN SAVAGE   DAVE VANDERSON   TONY MARTIN



KAREN BROWN   MICKY REED   LAURA TURNER



REBECCA HOYLAND   DARRON MANNING   MORGAN BARRELL



CAT HANDLEY   MIKE KENNY   DAVIE HANSON



JOHNNY STEFANO   CLAIRE STAMPER   ANDY WALSH

showcase their talent, as the UKDA team and I look to provide further exposure for players.

"We are also pleased to support any BDDA events in the future as we work together to deliver darts for everyone in the grassroots game."

Havard added: "I'm excited that we get to work alongside Johnny and his team, and I'm looking forward to seeing our organisation grow."

**CHE KERIN (Salopian Press Officer):**

"Although it's been almost nine months since a dart was thrown in pubs and clubs across Shropshire and beyond, much has happened in this time as local darts has undertaken a revolution that will potentially change the landscape of darts as we know it.

For many years the British Darts Organisation (BDO) was the driving force in local and county darts but in recent years they have endured darker times that have seen pub and club darts dwindle.

"This has sadly had a dramatic impact on the super leagues that feed into the County Darts set up, whilst ironically the popularity of darts on TV platforms such as the PDC go from strength to strength.

"Good news is just around the corner however, as from the

shadows of the BDO a new organization, the United Kingdom Darts Association (UKDA) has emerged heralding exciting times for British darts.

"The UKDA has plans to reinvent the County darts format and whilst there is much work still to be done they have allowed an opportunity for alternative darting regimes to join the Association.

"As a result of these changes and in a ground-breaking move SALOPIAN DARTS was recently accepted into the UKDA which means Shropshire now has two teams representing the County. "Other Counties from all over England and Wales including the likes of Cheshire, Cleveland, Carmarthenshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Clywd, Kent, Merseyside, Wirral and Derbyshire have joined the alliance.

"That is however, only part of the story for the Salopians who have gone back to the grass roots of darts within the County, integrating with numerous local leagues to develop a platform that will suit all ladies, men's and youth darts, and which will ultimately strengthen and feed new players into the County scene.

"A Men's super league has already been formed featuring 15 teams from towns across the County who have registered an interest from Wentnor to Whitchurch, Oswestry to Market Drayton, Shrewsbury to Telford and towns in between. Crucially there is a strong base within ladies darts which gives the potential for a strong individual league.

"Despite these unprecedented times where sports such as darts have taken a massive hit, it seems there is light at the end of the oche."

**PAUL JAMES (Oxfordshire Chairman):**

"During the early months of the summer Oxfordshire had a vote of where our members wanted to play county darts, it was decided all Super League players would get a vote, forgetting all the politics the net result was just over 60 per cent of our members opted for the UKDA system.

"The committee who had served the county fantastically over many years decided to stand down.

We held an EGM and a new committee was elected.

"Eventually all counties decided to ply their county trade within the UKDA, so the friendships built up over many years will be maintained which can only be a good thing .

UKDA have got some new innovative ideas for example a 'Magic Weekend' for the premierships where counties will play their last two fixtures in a multi board set up.

"UKDA must be congratulated on a fantastic proposal and have been amazingly positive on social media, it's time for everybody to put historical differences to one side and work together to reinvigorate county or should I say national league darts and bring some much needed positivity into county darts.

"On a personal side for Oxfordshire I want as many people as possible to come on board and make our county a success, I believe our venue at Bicester Ex-Services Club is one of the best in the system and they are so important to our development and continued success, Martin and his team have given us 100 per cent support and agreed to continue our sponsorship once county recommences.



RAVIN' ABOUT CAVEN...Jamie and Darren Webster (above) in great form

"I wish good luck and success to all the counties within the UKDA and once this Covid pandemic is finished we can get up and running, the lessons of the last few months have shown us that darts isn't the be all and end all in life, my hopes are when we restart we all play with a smile on our faces and revel in the great camaraderie in the sport of darts."

**RICHARD HANSON (Derbyshire Men's 'A' Team):**

"I played my first county game on the 11th September 2004 against Humberside with an average of 30.06. On the 1st March 2020 I completed my 121st representative county game having won 77 times for the 'A' team.

"I am absolutely over the moon to have been chosen out of all the Derbyshire players past and present for this opportunity to express my feelings

"All I ever wanted to do, since picking up a dart was play for Derbyshire. They played from the Top Club at New Whittington when I first started playing darts in my bedroom aged 14.

"Due to nerves I lost my first county match but Derbyshire kept faith in me and played me again. Unfortunately I also lost that one. Game number three I won. Best feeling ever!

"I absolutely love playing for my county. The people involved in running the county are unsung heroes without which, we wouldn't have a countyside.

"Without them there would be no county, period. The banter and camaraderie in our (my) Derbyshire team is second to none!

"And moving forward from these strange times it will only get stronger and tighter as our darting community grows. I personally voted UKDA as they offered a really strong business proposal and budget, so everyone knows exactly where they stand from the word go in this new and exciting era."

THE newly formed Gilberts Bar (Willenhall) Monday Individual Darts League organised and created by Simon Pritchard like many other leagues throughout the land has suffered due to the Covid-19 virus.

Kicking off its inaugural season on the 14th September the league, due to local and national regulations had to shut down on the 14th October with the majority of players having completed only five of the scheduled 62 fixtures.

At the time of shut down Alex Howells and Luke Wildman shared the number one spot on 42 points, Howells holding pole position as he had won four and drawn one as opposed to Wildman who had also won four but lost one.

Close on the heels of the leading duo comes Ben Johnson (41 points) and Steve Jones (40 points), it's everyone's hope play will resume as soon as possible and the battle for the title will continue.

**A**s organiser of the Ripley Elite Darts Singles League Daz Brown said: "In what turned out to be an extraordinarily different season, for the first time in its 10 year history the league expanded to three divisions with an amazing total of 70 players competing in the areas biggest and most popular singles league for the title."

The league began as normal in mid-October but lost four months of play due to lockdown and only just managed to finish the final four weeks before the new restrictions and second lockdown kicked in to stop all darting activity.

The top three places in the Premier Division all belonged to Ex-PDC tour card holders, Jamie Caven winning the title for a second successive season with Colin Osborne and Darron Brown finishing second and third respectively.

Caven with 123 points finished ten ahead of second placed Osborne who in turn was ten to the good of third placed Brown.

The twenty-eight strong division was full of quality players all of county standard with individual awards going to James Parkin, who notched the most 180s (27), the highest finish was shared between Colin Osborne and Ian Allcock who both recorded a maximum 170 finish.

The least darts was also shared with four players Paul Baker, Colin Osborne, Jamie Caven and Darren Webster all checking out in eleven darts, while the division's best average of 31.81 went to Pete Burgoyne.

Division One proved to be a battle royale all season with 13-year-old Derbyshire County 'A' team player

Henry Coates eventually clinching the title with 107 points, six more than runner-up Martin Courtney who had a seven points advantage over third in the division Pete Slater.

Fourth and fifth placed Ash Wood and Luke Pilgrim joined Coates and Courtney as the other automatic promoted players.

Also sealing his place in the top flight for the next campaign was Tony Jacklin who came through the play-offs beating Gary Burch in a very close final.

Awards in Division One saw Pete Slater hit eleven 180's, Joanne Oldershaw had the top finish, a maximum 170, while Henry Coates recorded not only the division's highest average of 32.53 per dart but also the overall league's top average. Coates and Luke Pilgrim also had the least darts which was twelve.

The newly-formed Division Two consisted of fourteen players who played each other twice. The eventual champion was Lee College who reigned supreme all season, finishing with 122 points, six to the good on runner-up and newly appointed REDSL committee member Jordan Beresford, the two top players gaining automatic promotion to Division One next season.

Joining College and Beresford will be another youngster, Alfie Osborne who in his first season secured his place in the middle tier via the play-off system.

Awards for Division Two went to Jayson Simpson with the most 180s (6), Jordan Beresford had the top finish of 152 plus the highest individual average of 22.16 per dart and Jayson Simpson recorded the season's best leg of 13 darts.

Daz Brown finished by saying: "With no start date to the next season I leave this report with the devastating news of the untimely passing of an original Ripley Elite Darts Singles League member and player David 'Boom Boom' Allcock who sadly passed away mid-season leaving a massive hole in each and every player.

"His bubbly personality was contagious and presence lit up the room, he will be missed terribly."

Rest in Peace David Allcock.



David Allcock



John Sidwell

**A**FTER a long six weeks battle, on the 22nd October Covid-19 claimed yet another one of Birmingham's top local darts players in the form of John Sidwell.

John was hailed by many Birmingham players as one heck of a darts player and an all-round terrific guy after losing his captain and good friend Dave Duncan played in the highly successful Dunky's Boys memorial team. He played most of his darts alongside his son Jack and with close friend Bob Nixon in the majority of local doubles knockouts.

John Sidwell, aged 57 was a truly devoted family man who leaves behind, and will be sorely missed by his loving wife Veronica, sons John, Luke and Jack plus his many friends and darting acquaintances.

Rest in Peace John Sidwell.

**\*Follow all of the news, results, reports and progress of the United Kingdom Darts Association in this column as the world of darts is reborn through the UKDA.**

# A look into the crystal bullseye

**IT'S June 2020. Dan Dawson is describing the final night of the Low6 Home Tour, with temporary sponsorship hoardings behind him as he peers into the action on his computer screen.**

Makeshift cameras are fixed facing the dartboards of Nathan Aspinall and Gary Anderson as they battle out the most unusual of PDC finals.

It is indicative of a sport world having to adapt to the very unusual circumstances that Covid-19 has created, and also a sign of how darts has undergone an extraordinary evolution from pub-focused participation sport to a game which has penetrated the professional level in the last 50 years.

Dr. Patrick Chaplin is one of the foremost authorities on how darts came to be ingrained on the national consciousness in the early 20th century.

It can be hard to imagine the arras without jeering crowds and an endless conveyor belt of floor and TV competitions, but you don't have to go back far to find the game in its primitive condition. Chaplin explained: "The first major boom for darts was actually in the inter-war years. Darts didn't exist as we know it today until the late Victorian period.

People seem to think that darts was always with us, always in the public house, but that wasn't the case. It found its way into pubs after finding its way into the fairground. It was a merger of a form of darts in England and a French game called 'flechettes', meaning small darts, and this is how we first got the wooden darts with turkey feathers.

"They were all made in France for a particular game and brought over here and very gradually the game of darts before WWI became a part of pub culture.

"The pub trade was an industry always under pressure - whether it be from the temperance movement, licensing acts or things like that. At this time, they were threatened by other attractions, spectator sports like football, or dancing, cinema and greyhound racing.

REPORT: THOMAS BARTLEY PHOTOGRAPHY: TAYLOR LANNING

## IS DARTS UNDERGOING A CULTURE CHANGE?



"This meant people were not in pubs drinking. Part of the growth of the pub in the inter-war period was the promotion of pub games, starting in London, which led to the first national darts organisation being set up in 1925.

"This aimed to organise the game in such a way that it brought together all of the leagues in England under one umbrella. This meant that when the brewers got together with the licensees, under these newly organised leagues, there was a growth in participation, and this continued right until 1939, throughout WWII, but then became less organised after the war.

"There was then the National Darts Association of Great Britain which sort of controlled the game right from the 1950s until the 1970s. So up until this period, darts was extremely popular, and not just with men, but with women too."

**It is quite clear to see that the relationship between the pub and darts was a very fundamental one, not just for the development and growth of the game but for the public house's sustainability.**

**So how is it that we are seeing such a decline of the game's role in pubs and clubs?**

For starters, it is quite clear to see that this relationship was one born out of economic necessity for pubs and in a changing world, where they have evolved to become more family-orientated, the dartboard has increasingly found itself isolated.

Plus, many pubs are finding themselves increasingly up against it. More than 5,000 of them are reported to have closed since December 2014, and those were pre-Covid 19 estimates.

The industry is estimated to have lost £100 million each month during the first national lockdown, and even if pubs may be able to return to more consistent levels of income next year, they are having to adjust to the new norms of social distancing and controls over

opening hours.

There are some offering resistance to this supposed change of tide within the game. Darts in Stoke is an organisation which aims to bring attention to events and leagues in the Stoke and Staffordshire region. It offers an interesting case study.

Stoke is a city steeped in darts history, having produced Phil Taylor and Adrian Lewis to name but a couple and being where Eric Bristow and partner Maureen Flowers plied their trade when both were at their best. But like many other places across Britain, it is seeing a rapid decline in the spaces where the sport once thrived.

Shaun Rogers from Darts in Stoke told me: "The history with the area and darts is so embedded. No matter what pub you go in, if you get on the board, they will always say, 'Are you the next Taylor?'"

It's what happens around here, however sadly over time more and more of the traditional pubs are drifting away and now we see pubs that only get the board on the wall on a darts night. I don't think the sports roots are under threat around here as we had before lockdown perhaps over 400 players playing in the various weekly leagues and whenever we hold darts knockouts we see good strong numbers attending the events we hold.

"But I do fear that if the Covid-19 pandemic shuts venues then there will be a loss to a generation of players, which is why we are now looking to work with the Staffordshire Darts Academy to open a new venue in Newcastle-under-Lyme for 8-18 year old players."

**Flight Club is an example of a different darts to that which we might be familiar with. Giving a glossier shine to the sport, it aims to provide what it calls 'Social Darts'.**

**Here, a night playing arras is an experience rather than a way of life or a regular weekly fixture.** Flight Club takes the game's fast-paced nature to a whole new level, developing short and exciting

games for punters - largely not those you may expect to be a member of a local team or league - to enjoy. Although Flight Club has extended its bases outside of London, it remains focused in Britain's big cities. It certainly doesn't feel like an 'experience' tailored or pitched to the local players of Stoke-on-Trent. But that doesn't make it a bad thing.

PhD student Mark Ball, who looked into local darts in Stoke as part of a project on 'leisure, meaning and a sense of place', suggested to me: "Flight Club presents itself as an interesting contradiction. On one hand, it's throwing darts at a board - the same thing, but a different one also. With Flight Club, you obviously have to pay. It's two different visions of leisure in the city, drinking and throwing darts at the board with all the convivial feel of a darts match but very different and marketed in a different way.

"For me, it brings up an interesting question of who are cities for? If there are local darts leagues in London struggling

then where does that leave these social spaces? It isn't as visible in Stoke but does say something about that question.

"In my eyes, bashing one thing or the other is slightly less interesting than looking at how cities are changing and I think it's fine for people to go to Flight Club and maybe they will even join a team off the back of it. But I think it really represents a 'novelty economy' where you may do something fun but have a loose attachment to it, and I think it speaks to a loose attachment to darts, and maybe it suggests that that is valued more than that deeper relationship. Where can people go with that, because this is a private enterprise and leagues do need businesses to be supportive of them and in city centres it just makes more sense to sell booze.

"But I think Darts in Stoke has something which Flight Club doesn't. The pub I played at had five teams, three women's and two men's, and three dartboards and that was a small pub.



game is now much less focused on the British Isles.

The US Darts Masters, for example, the PDC's current sole World Series event in North America, was due to be held at the Madison Square Garden in New York this year, an extravagant and luxurious venue far both in distance and image from the clubs which used to be the cornerstone of the sport.

PDC Chief Executive Matt Porter told me of the organisation's future plans. He said: "Our short term strategy is about managing the Covid situation - unfortunately our global expansion plans are on hold. We're in regular contact with our affiliates around the world to ensure they are able to manage the situation locally and plan for their restart at the appropriate time.

"Commercially, we're working with our stakeholders like broadcasters and sponsors to ensure we're delivering the best possible products for players and fans at this time and I think so far we've done OK on that front.

"In terms of marketing, clearly we're not really selling tickets at this time (although the 2021 Premier League is on sale) but we're working hard behind the scenes to ensure we're in the best possible shape for being ready to push the button at the right time."

The PDC may have been stopped in its tracks by the Coronavirus pandemic, but there is no doubt that its evolution continues.

Porter added: "I wouldn't say the PDC has moved the sport away from the pubs and clubs of the UK - I'd say the pubs and clubs of the UK have done that by removing dart boards!

"We have unquestionably increased the profile of the sport over the last 10-20 years and because of the way in which we have done that, it now attracts an audience other than the traditional demographic. I don't think changing darts is a risk - I think it was essential: the sport moved on hugely in the 90s and has continued on that upward trajectory ever since...if you stand still you go backwards so for us it has always been about evolving the product and giving the public what they want."

**Although changes to the sport's makeup may be down partly to external factors, there is no doubt the PDC has played a part in changing the game's image.**

When he spoke to me in 2017, former pro turned SkySports pundit Wayne Mardle offered some interesting insights on the dilemma darts faces. He said: "The first ever darts league I played in was the London Superleague, I was 12 years old. We played in pubs all over London. It was a great experience for me as a player, and

"There were two guys on the team I was on who had been playing for 50 years and through that had a really strong attachment to place. It is something you can keep up when you are older and isolation can prove a real problem, so being able to do something affordable is really important. There were other people who would often play but sometimes wouldn't and would just stay and watch. There is a really strong culture around it, with the World Championships having been there and having had so many great players like Phil Taylor."

**It is not just at a grassroots level where change seems to be happening. The birth and growth of the Professional Darts Corporation has seen the sport modelled in a different way. The PDC are increasingly looking global, with events not just across Europe, but Asia and North America too.** Differences and distinctions in the audiences of those continents and nations has seen darts evolve, and the professional centre of the

also a great life education. The good old days. Most public houses back then had a dartboard and pool table, not a booth for four to have a gourmet burger and a skinny latte."

But he came to an interesting conclusion. "Times have changed. The space a board takes up and the punters wanted in the alehouses now just doesn't fit. Darts isn't seen as a way of income. It's all down to numbers.

"Like I've already mentioned, I grew up playing in the pubs and clubs in London. Most of the younger players now have bypassed that, and have gone straight from playing in the bedroom to playing in tournaments. The days of the pubs being an outlet for players went about ten years ago. The money in the sport will mean there will always be players."

Darts' evolution over recent years has been a fascinating one, and trying to draw simplistic conclusions on how and why it has happened, and what sort of impact it is having on the game, is no easy challenge.

**But as darts continues to attract more and different people, and how we consume the game develops, there is no doubt that the game is fundamentally changing, and has already fundamentally changed. How the sport looks in another 10, 20 or 30 years is for its players and organisers to decide.**

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# Alan Glazier (January 21, 1939 - November 12, 2020)

BY ALEX MOSS - WEEKLY DARTSCAST

**WHEN we think back to the first golden era in darts, during the 1970s and 1980s, names like Eric Bristow, Jocky Wilson, John Lowe, Keith Deller, Bob Anderson and Bobby George immediately come to mind.**

Before all of those names lit up our television screens there was another player who blazed a trail. Alan Glazier is one of the unsung pioneers in the history of this great sport, and sadly passed away on November 12 at the age of 81.

During the first lockdown the Weekly Dartscast ran a Darts Legends series, and I had the pleasure of interviewing close to 20 players and officials who left their mark on the game.

Glazier was one of them and, just from listening to his voice on the other end of the phone, his enthusiasm and passion for darts shone through.

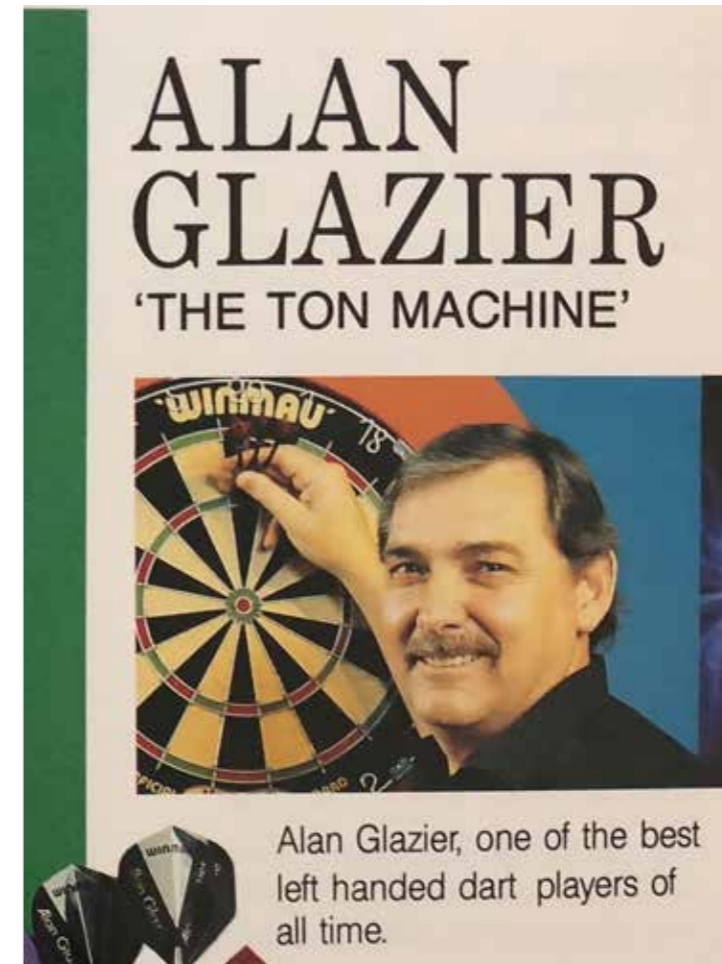
From his humble beginnings when he first started playing in 1969, winning the singles title in the Twickenham League, which sparked a 35-year career and saw him travel the world.

In 1970, Glazier was invited to play in the Slough Super League, and it was there that he met Tommy Barrett, who was the first player to win the iconic News Of The World two years in a row, at Alexandra Palace in 1964 and 1965.

It was Barrett who inspired Glazier to persist further with darts, and he did so by becoming one of the first players to turn professional.

He said: "I put an advert in Darts World asking for exhibitions, to go in the pubs and play darts. The first one that came up was two nights in Birmingham. I got £25 quid a night and then loads of bookings came after that.

"The exhibitions went on for the rest of my career. I was doing more exhibitions than I was playing in tournaments! I was on the road six days a week. I was the



**"They called me 'the legend', I don't know why!"**

first professional. I was doing exhibitions, which nobody else did. Barry Twomlow played for Unicorn and won the News Of The World (in 1969) did it, but he was just working for Unicorn."

During the 1970s, Glazier would establish himself as one of the top players. In the summer of 1977 came arguably his finest moment, as he won a huge haul of titles in America, including the Santa Monica and North American Open singles, as well as a mixed pairs title with a partner who had never played before!

He added: "I was partnered with this girl that had never thrown a dart in her life before. I started off, bang 180. Every leg I hit a 180, while she was hitting 26 and nine, and we ended up winning it. How we won that I'll never know!"

Glazier made more history in 1978,

playing in the opening day of the very first BDO World Championship. It would be the first of nine appearances in the tournament for Glazier, who would adopt the nicknames of 'The Ton Machine' as well as 'The Man In Black', a nod to his all-black attire at the oche.

After being pipped to the News Of The World title by his good friend Bobby George, 2-0 in the 1979 final, Glazier's best run at the BDO World Championship came in 1986. Held at the famous Lakeside Country Club for the first time, the unseeded Glazier would knock out Bob Sinnaeve, Deller and Terry O'Dea to reach the semi-finals.

He said: "I had three hard games to get to the semi-finals. I was 3-0 up on Terry and won 4-3 in the end and it finished at 1 o'clock in the morning! The next day I played Eric and my arm was killing me. It gradually wore off, but I was 3-0 down and fought back (eventually losing 5-3). I thought that was going to be my year, but never mind."

Glazier proudly represented his country during the 1970s and 1980s, along with multiple appearances on the Bullseye TV show and, long after his final World Championship appearance in 1987, remained a popular fixture on the exhibition circuit for many more years.

He added: "I kept going with the exhibitions. I was doing shows up and down the country and in the end I became an entertainer, rather than a killer. I used to be a killer in darts, but it wore off. When you go to shows you've got to entertain.

"You get involved with so many people, it's crazy. I thoroughly enjoyed what I did for 35 years. It's been out of this world. Darts took over my life and I was probably the best left hander for 20 years. It's been brilliant."

Check out full interview: <https://theweeklydartscast.libsyn.com/darts-legends-10-alan-glazier>



**H**ere is our second installment of the Darts Database Ultra 9s - the best performance indicators taken from all PDC matches and all 128 PDC Tour Card holders to help inform your analysis and predictions for the upcoming World Championship at The Ally Pally. The Ultra 9s will soon be available to look at over your chosen time period, through Darts Database Premium (available with Darts Prime). Here are the top 5 in each category for November. Despite being third favourite to retain his world title, Snakebite features in eight of the nine categories and tops the pile in six of them!

**1. Scoring**

Average score after 9 darts

- Peter Wright** 174.38
- Jose De Sousa** 175.92
- Michael van Gerwen** 177.22
- Gerwyn Price** 177.50
- Michael Smith** 179.70

**2. Explosiveness**

Legs won in 12 darts or less

- Peter Wright** 11.36%
- Jose De Sousa** 11.33%
- Gerwyn Price** 10.88%
- Michael Smith** 9.23%
- Dave Chisnall** 8.92%



**3. Efficiency**

Legs won in 15 darts or less

- Peter Wright** 53.90%
- Gerwyn Price** 49.51%
- Jose De Sousa** 48.01%
- Krzystof Ratajski** 47.04%
- Michael van Gerwen** 46.39%

**4. Reliability**

Legs won in 18 darts or less

- Peter Wright** 88.22%
- Krzystof Ratajski** 87.07%
- Gerwyn Price** 87.06%
- Michael van Gerwen** 86.21%
- James Wade** 85.71%

**6. Accuracy**

Treble scoring accuracy on 20, 19, 18 & 17

- Peter Wright** 44.19%
- Michael van Gerwen** 43.46%
- Gerwyn Price** 43.17%
- Jose De Sousa** 43.01%
- Ryan Searle** 41.86%



**5. Clinical Finishing**

Finishes taken in the minimum possible darts

- Adrian Lewis** 25.71%
- Gerwyn Price** 25.51%
- Peter Wright** 25.47%
- Jose De Sousa** 25.40%
- James Wade** 24.14%

**7. Checkouts**

Overall % on the 21 different segments (including the bull)

- Peter Wright** 44.16%
- Ryan Joyce** 44.08%
- Gerwyn Price** 43.45%
- James Wade** 43.18%
- Krzystof Ratajski** 42.31%

**8. Functional Checkouts**

Checkout % discounting misses that didn't cost the player the leg

- Ryan Joyce** 55.10%
- Peter Wright** 53.26%
- Gerwyn Price** 52.81%
- James Wade** 52.80%
- Krzystof Ratajski** 52.32%



**9. Match Clinching\***

The accuracy on doubles in attempts which, if successful, would result in winning the match

- Gavin Carlin** 59.82%
- Gerwyn Price** 51.69%
- Steve West** 49.56%
- Simon Stevenson** 48.96%
- Richard North** 47.40%

\*due to only having a small data sample for this metric for November, the top 5 has been based on the year to date in 2020.



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